

Connections

LGBTQ+ Pride June 2021



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Office of Policy, Management and Budget
Administrative Services and the
Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights

Juneteenth
SPECIAL SECTION

Message from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services



June 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present to you the LGBTQ+ Pride issue of **Connections** Magazine with its special section on our newest federal holiday, Juneteenth Day.

Speaking of pride: when **Secretary Haaland** and her child **Somáh** graciously agreed to participate in this issue by sharing their story around gender fluidity and nonbinary expression (page 5), I was filled with so much pride to know that **Connections** exists as a safe space, a place of inclusion and respect that honors, uplifts and celebrates everyone. Their story is filled with warmth and wisdom.

Also in this issue:

- The Connections Vanguard Award for June is presented to **Orien Richmond**, USFWS, for helping to build the LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group into a thriving resource for the community (page 7);
- **Katherine Vultaggio** shares a “Day in the Life” raising three transgender children with patience and unconditional love (page 11);
- **Ethan Taylor** and his husband **Jim Walker** share the joys of their international adoption story (page 15);
- A magnificent collection of profiles and photos in our **DOI Pride** feature will enlighten and delight (beginning page 26); and



- We celebrate Juneteenth Day with a message from **Secretary Haaland**, vintage photos, and insightful comments from DOI’s **Shelita Saint-Louis, Nichole King-Campbell, Joe Edmonds** and **Acquanetta Newson** (beginning on page 48).

I look forward to continuing the conversation each month with **Connections** and our **Third Thursdays** round table discussions as we envision together a more inclusive, equitable and respectful future for us all.

As always, please be well and stay safe.

Jacqueline M. Jones



Connections magazine is produced each month by a collaborative, multiagency team of volunteer employees from throughout DOI. Under the direction of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services **Jacqueline M. Jones** and Director of the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights **Erica White-Dunston, Esq.**, who serves as the Principal

Diversity Officer for the Department, the **Connections** team strives to foster an environment where all employees are respected, valued, accepted, appreciated and feel included.

To find out more or to submit your ideas and suggestions for future issues, please contact editor Steve Carlisle at stephen_carlisle@ibc.doi.gov. Your input is very welcome!



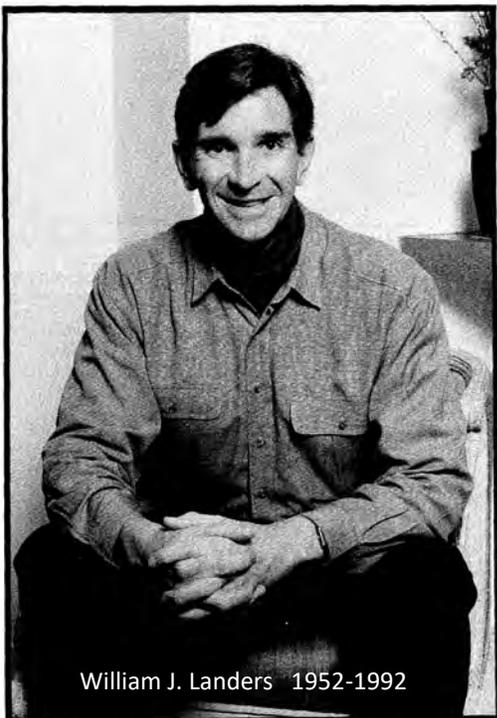
Welcome	2
Progress Pride Flag over the MIB	3
Dedication / Keith Haring	4
The Secretary and Somáh	5
Connections Vanguard Award	7
Stonewall Inn: A Movement Takes Shape	8
Pulse Nightclub National Historic Site	10
A Day in the Life: Raising Trans Kids	11
Catching Up with Maria and Ana	13
Human Rights Campaign	14
Ethan Taylor: Creating a Family Together	15
Two Spirit: A Sacred Gift	17
Veteran Spotlight: AJ Legault	19
Resilience: Meryland Cuevas-Canela	21
Perspectives: Michael Groomer	22
Pronouns and Respect/David Hockley	24
Compassion: Matthew, Billy and Me	25
SPECIAL FEATURE: DOI Pride!	26
Feds Feed Families	46
Third Thursdays Roundtable Talks	47
SPECIAL SECTION: JUNETEENTH	48
Message from the Director, ODICR	49
Juneteenth Proclamation	50
A New National Holiday	51
Juneteenth Historical Photographs	52
Recommended Children’s Books	54
Voices for Change: Juneteenth	55
Message from the Secretary re Juneteenth	56
Invitation to Join the Connections Team	58



PRIDE

Secretary Deb Haaland raised the Progress Pride Flag over the MIB on June 15, 2021. This is the first time a Pride flag has been flown at Interior headquarters, marking Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) Pride Month. The Progress Pride Flag, which will be flown through June 30, includes black and brown stripes to represent marginalized LGBTQ+ communities of color, along with the colors pink, light blue and white, which are used on the Transgender Pride Flag. [More about the flag here](#)

William J. Landers, Esq.



William J. Landers 1952-1992

The ladies I worked with let me know that our new boss was “funny that way.” Bill Landers was young, handsome, brilliant and kind, one of the most well-regarded prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Los Angeles, and he was taking over as chief of our unit.

I was immediately intrigued. It was the early Eighties, and up until then the only gay people I knew of besides myself were Paul Lynde, Charles Nelson Reilly and Truman Capote – not a role model in the bunch. Now here was an openly gay person whose career and personal success I not only admired but perhaps could emulate.

I was particularly impressed by the level of respect he enjoyed throughout the office; admittedly, at the time I didn’t know it was possible for straight people to see beyond queerness. But they did. In fact, Bill was so admired that when our Reagan-appointed U.S. Attorney

Stephen S. Trott was promoted to Assistant Attorney General and sent to Washington, D.C., Bill was asked to join Mr. Trott to serve as Deputy Associate Attorney General, making Bill one of the highest-ranking openly gay federal employees at the time.

When he was still in Los Angeles, Bill took steps to improve the experience of support staff, something we had never seen prior to his arrival. Bill was unfailingly compassionate, someone who saw us as individuals, not just “the girls (plus me) in the office.” When he left for Washington, Bill presented us with a plaque of appreciation emblazoned with all our names. In a word, Bill was a gentleman.

It was a sad day years later when we learned Bill had died of AIDS-related complications at the age of 40. Oh Bill. I never had the chance to tell you how much it meant to me to see your success, to know you for the remarkable person you were – and to hope I could one day earn the same level of respect from my peers as you did as an openly gay person.

I’m honored to dedicate this issue of **Connections** to the memory of my friend and role model, William J. Landers.

- Steve Carlisle (he/him),
Connections Editor



In 1988, artist Keith Haring was diagnosed with AIDS. He publicly acknowledged his illness in a remarkably candid interview in Rolling Stone magazine. His response to his illness was characteristically philosophical. “No matter how long you work, it’s always going to end sometime. And there’s always going to be things left undone.Part of the reason that I’m not having trouble facing the reality of death is that it’s not a limitation, in a way. It could have happened any time, and it is going to happen sometime. If you live your life according to that, death is irrelevant. Everything I’m doing right now is exactly what I want to do.” Keith Haring died of AIDS-related complications in 1990.

The Secretary and Somáh

Editor's Note: Secretary Deb Haaland (she/her) is making equity and inclusion a priority for the Interior Department as part of President Biden's Executive Order: [Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#). For this month's *Connections* Magazine feature, Secretary Haaland and her child Somáh (they/them) share their experiences and offer some great advice about sharing joy and living authentically.

Q: Madam Secretary, how has your child coming out changed your perspective on how we approach gender inclusivity?

Secretary Haaland: When Somáh told me they identified as non-binary, they very candidly told me that straight people didn't have to come out so why should LGBTQI+ people have to? It was a good point and it made me see this issue through a very different light. I completely agree with Somáh. It's part of the reason why many people include their preferred pronouns in email signatures and social media profiles – it creates the space so that everyone is treated the same. As a straight person who identifies as a woman, I have the privilege of not having to disclose my pronouns, but when I do, I'm creating the space for others to do so without putting the burden only on them. I'm incredibly proud of the person Somáh has grown into, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for them.

Q: What does it mean to be non-binary, and why is it important for us to understand?

Somáh: Being non-binary means that I don't subscribe to the gender binary - and that I don't identify either as a man or a woman. The gender binary is a social construct, and although the majority of people are comfortable being put into one of two categories, there are many gender-expansive identities that lie outside of this binary. It is important for us to understand this so that we may change the way we look at gender, and so that we can stop making assumptions about folks based on the way that they present themselves.



Q: What can we do to be more inclusive and supportive of those who are of non-binary expression and gender fluidity, particularly in the workplace and at home?

Secretary Haaland: I think we have to love our fellow human beings no matter what. We should have compassion for everyone, while recognizing that there are communities in this country who still live with the legacy of discrimination. At the Department of the Interior, we're working to lift up those voices and celebrate them, and we acknowledge our responsibility to untangle the legacy of policy decisions that contribute to systemic discrimination. I'm very proud of the strides this Administration is taking to make sure we have an equity lens when we build policies all across government.

Somáh: The first thing that I tell people is, make sharing your pronouns with other people a regular practice. If you are cisgender - meaning your gender matches the sex you were assigned at birth - you may think that it is "obvious" that you identify as a man or a woman by the way you look or dress, but we cannot assume people's identities or pronouns by simply looking at them. When you share your pronouns publicly in your personal bios or when you're meeting new people in a professional setting (in a meeting you can say, "let's go around the room and share your name and pronouns"), you are normalizing this practice and making a space for trans and non-binary people that shows them they can be safe and comfortable being themselves. Help folks know that they are included in these spaces not by objectifying them, but by simply helping to break this idea that one's gender and sex are congruent.

[CONT'D]

The Secretary and Somáh [Continued]



[Above] Somáh: "This is from our feast day at Jemez Pueblo, circa 2002. My mom always made sure that I was learning and participating in our traditions from a young age - and this past fall I danced at Jemez without her for the first time (because she was so busy on the campaign trail!) Because of her love and belief in me, I was able to participate with confidence. I sometimes struggle with my identity as I look so mixed and half of my time was spent growing up away from the reservation. But mom has raised me Pueblo and makes sure I know where I come from."

Photo by Alexandra Harris-Schupman

Q: *What support would you offer to children and their family members to help them navigate gender expression?*

Secretary Haaland: We have to be compassionate and respectful. Life is already hard enough without having to worry about how other people will treat you because of who you are. Everyone's journey is different, but that doesn't take away from the fact that every person deserves dignity, respect, and to be treated fairly. That applies everywhere, with family, friends, coworkers, everyone.

Somáh: I would say to parents and elders: make sure your child knows that they are safe to be themselves with you. Support them in whatever they want to do. I am so grateful that, when I was a child, my parents never restricted what I could or couldn't do based on my gender. I was never told that I couldn't do or wear or play with something because it was "for boys" - a limit that I often see parents put on children. Let your kids be kids. Make yourself a safe space for them to be themselves.

And I would say to children: It's okay to explore. It's okay to change your mind. It's okay to try out different versions of yourself. That's how we find out who we are. Once you have the power of knowing that, no one can take it away from you.

I believe that by encouraging youth without placing expectations on them, we can create a society where they grow up to be secure, confident, and happy adults. Creating this society starts at home. Let's love children for exactly who they are - no exceptions.

"Everyone's journey is different, but that doesn't take away from the fact that every person deserves dignity, respect, and to be treated fairly. That applies everywhere, with family, friends, coworkers, everyone."

- Secretary Haaland

Right: Jemez Pueblo Storyteller Figurine by Carol G. Lucero Gachupin.



VANGUARD AWARD

LEADING THE WAY
ADVOCATING FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION
ORIENT RICHMOND
JUNE 2021



The *Vanguard Award* is presented by the *Connections* Team each month to recognize and celebrate the achievements of DOI employees who lead the way championing equity and inclusion. For June, the *Connections* Team is delighted to honor **Orient Richmond** (he/him), Fish and Wildlife Biologist with FWS's National Wildlife Refuge System. Over the past two years, Orient helped to establish the first DOI LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group (ERG) with a specific focus on FWS staff. In two years the ERG has grown from a handful in Denver to over 170 members nationwide, including employees from offices and bureaus throughout the Department. Says Orient, "Ensuring that all of our employees feel like they are part of the team is a deep passion of mine because our potential is most fully realized when we are respected and included." For his outstanding efforts, the *Connections* Team presents Orient with our *Vanguard Award* for June 2021.

Stonewall Inn: A Movement Takes Shape

From the National Park Service

Through the 1960s almost everything about living openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer person was a violation of law, rule, or policy. New York City's prohibitions against homosexual activities were particularly harsh. People were arrested for wearing fewer than three articles of clothing that matched their sex. Serving alcoholic beverages to homosexuals was prohibited. For married men and women who lived homosexual lives in secret, blackmail was a constant threat. Discrimination and fear were tools to isolate people when homosexuality was hidden. After Stonewall, being "out and proud" in numbers was a key strategy that strengthened the movement.

Stonewall was a milestone for LGBTQ+ civil rights that provided momentum for a movement. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, a police raid on [the Stonewall Inn](#) in New York City provoked a spontaneous act of resistance.

Demonstrations continued over the next several nights at Christopher Park across from the Stonewall Inn and in the surrounding neighborhood. When asked to describe the difference that Stonewall had made, journalist Eric Marcus

observed that before Stonewall, "For most people, there was no out, there was just in."

People who would identify today as LGBTQ+ had few choices for socializing in public and many bars they frequented were operated by organized crime. Members of the police force were often paid off in return for information about planned raids. Customers caught in a raid were routinely freed, but only after being photographed and humiliated with names and pictures often printed in newspapers. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, people fought back.

Following what at first appeared to be a routine raid, a crowd gathered outside to watch for friends in the bar. But as police vans came to haul away those arrested, the crowd became angry, began throwing objects, and attempted to block the way. The crowd's aggression forced police to retreat and barricade themselves inside the Stonewall Inn. Onlookers joined in and attacked the bar with pennies, metal garbage cans, bricks, bottles, an uprooted parking meter, and burning trash. The confrontation grew as the fire department and the NYPD's Tactical Patrol Force, trained for riot control, joined police reinforcements sent to the scene. [CONT'D]



Stonewall Protest, June 1969. Photo courtesy of Fred W. McDarrah Archive/Museum of the City of New York

Stonewall Inn: A Movement Takes Shape (Continued)

The agitated crowd took to the streets chanting “Gay Power!” and “Liberate Christopher Street!” LGBTQ+ youth who gathered at Christopher Park—some of them homeless and with little social capital—challenged police, linked arms, and formed a blockade. Police charged the crowd, but rather than disperse, the mob retreated to the neighborhood they knew well with its network of narrow, winding streets, doubled-back, and regrouped near the Stonewall Inn and Christopher Park, surprising the police.

Demonstrator Tommy Schmidt described the feeling of being in the melee: “I was part of a mob that had a kind of deep identity and was acting as one force.” John O’Brien said, “What excited me was I finally was not alone.”

Social change takes different forms. Pioneers organized and took a range of actions and approaches in the fight for their equality. Stonewall was a galvanizing moment that



empowered a range of advocacy; some mainstream, and some non-conforming or militant, that rejected approaches based on assimilation.

Now Park Rangers tell the story of Stonewall, one of the seminal moments in LGBTQ+ history.



Secretary Haaland and National Park Rangers at the Stonewall Inn National Monument, Manhattan, NY, June 2021. Interior photos

From Tragedy to a Place of Remembrance



Alex Padilla for introducing the companion bill. We are thankful that members of the U.S. House and Senate passed the bills unanimously.

It is so meaningful to everyone here, especially the families of the 49, survivors, first responders, and all the lives affected, that our federal government recognizes the depth of the tragedy of Pulse. It's also a clear and lasting message to the LGBTQ+ community that what happened at Pulse matters and will never be forgotten for future generations, and that we will always outlove hate.

In the words of the President: "Just over five years ago, the Pulse nightclub, a place of acceptance and joy, became a place of unspeakable pain and loss. And we'll never fully recover, but we'll remember. May a president never have to sign another bill designating a monument like this."

Pictured: Images of memorials held in Orlando, FL following the Pulse Nightclub tragedy courtesy of the One Pulse Foundation.

Pulse Nightclub Designated National Historic Site

On June 25, 2021, President Biden signed a bill to honor the victims of the [2016 Pulse nightclub shooting](#) in Orlando, FL, by designating the Pulse Nightclub as a National Memorial.

[The One Pulse Foundation](#), a charitable organization whose mission is to create and support a memorial that opens hearts and minds by establishing a sanctuary of healing to ensure Pulse nightclub's legacy of love lives on forever, issued the following statement:

We are eternally grateful to President Joe Biden and his administration for signing the bill to designate Pulse nightclub as a National Memorial.

When he came to Orlando immediately following the tragedy in 2016 with then-President Barack Obama to meet with those who were affected, his presence, words of support and promise to stand with us will always be remembered in our hearts.

We want to recognize U.S. Representatives Darren Soto, Val Demings and Stephanie Murphy for sponsoring and introducing the bill and Senators Rick Scott, Marco Rubio and



A Day in the Life: Raising Trans Kids

By Katherine Vultaggio (she/her)

Human beings are odd animals; we have the ability to consider others' perspectives and empathize with them, which makes us unique. We have an awareness that people come from many different backgrounds, have wildly varying sets of circumstances, and that our genetics and our experiences shape who we are and how we see the world. We also have an innate tendency to assume others experience the world through the same lens as we do. We also really enjoy assuming we are "right."



You may wonder what this has to do with being the parent of transgender children (yes, I said "children" - plural!). The fact of the matter is, in the age of digital anonymity, the normalization of rudeness as a right, and the politicization of opinion as fact, people are not afraid to bluntly tell you what they think! And when your kids'

gender identification is "different" than the "norm," there is no shortage of judgement directed your way on a daily basis. I'd like to tell you my story, in the hopes that my message reaches at least one person and helps them to consider a different perspective.

I was raised in the Christian Church, in a "straight" or Cis-gender family, and was told under no uncertain terms that I would be disowned if I were to come out as gay or bisexual (I'm not sure what my parents would have done if I were transgender). I instinctively knew that this was not a way to love and accept your children; it felt extremely ugly to me. I grew up being an ally to gay, bisexual, lesbian, and

transgender friends. A child of the 80s and 90s, my perspective was that labels "didn't matter." I cared about people and accepted them as they were, and that was that.

Fast forward to motherhood - by itself, a daunting challenge that I happily accepted.

I was determined to accept and love my kids, no matter what. I had three children, two of whom were diagnosed with Autism. I navigated raising neuro-diverse kids with gusto - I thought I had it all locked down and was pretty darn impressed with myself and what my family had accomplished! Then puberty struck my oldest. There were questions about sexuality. I figured this was normal (no big thing) and was supportive when my child needed space to explore being a lesbian. I was on board! "I've got this!" Then, new changes emerged: my child came to me, shyly explaining that they no longer "felt like a female." I had no idea what to do with this! I didn't know there was a gender

spectrum, much less such a thing as being "nonbinary," "agender," or that pronouns such as "they," "them" and "theirs" were a thing. I tried my best to be patient and learn from my child.

The hardest part for me, something that surprised me the most, was when my child told me they no longer wanted to be called by their birth name. My husband and I had put so much love, thought and care into naming our children, this felt like a punch to the gut. Regardless, though, and with many mistakes/misgendering snafus/dead-naming slips, we all adjusted just fine. My rationale was, "If this is what it takes for my child to be happy and feel

loved, respected, and accepted, then so be it!"

[CONT'D]



A Day in the Life: Raising Trans Kids (Continued)

Regardless, I'm glad that we just rolled with it. As a parent you wonder - is this just a period of questioning? Is this forever? And you really don't know, because understanding themselves as people takes time while your kids mature. Gender can also be fluid, so the needle may *never* settle on any one end of the spectrum for long! These are things that I have clumsily learned along the way.

Okay, after taking a deep breath, I thought, "All right, that was harder than I thought it would be," but again, I was darn proud of myself and my family for what we had conquered. Enter stage left, my second born child, had a similar experience of identifying with being agender. Shortly after, my youngest came out to me (while in junior high) that he identifies as male.

Whoa: ALL THREE OF MY KIDS ARE PART OF THE LGBTQ+ FAMILY! Daunting? Yes. Surprising? Definitely! Impossible to work through? No. But . . .

I genuinely started freaking out - about what the VERY vocal world would have to say to me and my kids. In my head, I could hear questions I might be asked: "There's no way they could ALL be trans; **what are you doing** to encourage this?" "This is wrong, this is perverse." "You should reject this kind of behavior," and worse. On TV people were ranting about how transgender people should not be allowed in bathrooms. "They can go outside like animals" is what I was hearing. MY fault?? I didn't know the first thing about being transgender, much less would I EVER try to force some personal agenda on how they see themselves (as anything other than the bright,

talented, good-hearted people that they are). MY kids? Perverts? Trying to peep others in bathrooms? I can tell you that has never been an issue with my family (or any other transgender person I've known).

Of course, my inner "momma bear" was showing, but these were very real and very scary worries. I had to privately let myself get scared, get angry, and I let myself cry. I readied myself for the judgement and hate that would inevitably come our way. In the end, I decided that I would simply keep being my kids' mom, and do what I always do; protect them, respect them, prepare them to be good people to someday go out into the world to make a difference for the better. I am extremely proud of my kids. They are model students, they are responsible, caring, and gifted.

People tend to fear the unknown or what they don't understand. Heck, I *totally* did not understand what it meant to be the parent of trans kids until I was one!

If you are still reading this, thank you - from the bottom of my heart. Please consider the idea that it does no harm to you if you choose to accept others as they are. You don't have to like them, agree with anything, or change who you are to treat others with common courtesy. And honestly, that's pretty much all I would hope for.

If you know someone that would benefit from reading this, please share it with them. If you'd like to learn more about parents of transgender kids, here's a link: <https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/misconceptions-about-raising-a-trans-teen>

Pictured, left to right: Zach, Apollo and Hawke Vultaggio



Catching Up with Maria and Ana

**Q&A with *Connections* [2020 LGBTQ Pride Issue](#)
Cover Stars Ana Suero-Ogando and Maria Gonzalez
Melendez**

By Abigail T. True (she/her), AVSO

It's wonderful to be in touch with you both again. How have you fared the past year?

This past year has been emotionally challenging, to say the least. Not being able to see family and friends for awhile, worrying about what the future might bring and concern over the wellbeing of our loved ones took an emotional toll. Despite the challenges of the past year, we've had a few accomplishments that we are proud of and grateful for!

What prominent challenges and triumphs have you faced?

The challenges we faced pretty much centered around working from home in a one-bedroom apartment. Our workstation occupied part of our living room/kitchen area. We didn't have much space left for a workstation in our bedroom too, so we managed to work three feet apart, facing opposite directions. There were times when we had meetings scheduled at the same time, and one of us had to go into the bedroom and try

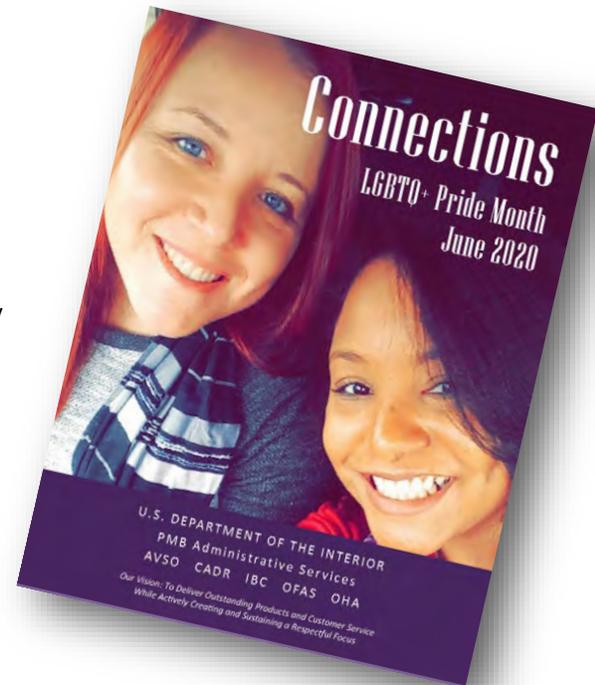


to attend the meeting from there only to transfer back to the living room/kitchen workstation afterwards. We did that for the entire year! We enjoy each other's company of course, but we grew tired of running to the bedroom for unexpected virtual calls or meetings. We laugh about it now, but not back then! There were other challenges we faced that were pandemic related. Ana lost her dear grandmother to COVID-19 and that was heartbreaking. Since we couldn't fly out to New York for her funeral, the only way to attend her service was through a Zoom call. That was one of the hardest experiences we have ever faced in our lives. We remember Grandma Hilda as a very loving, accepting, and strong woman. She will forever be in our hearts.

As far as triumphs, due to the challenges of working from home, we decided to move out of our one-bedroom apartment and buy a house! As you can imagine, house hunting mid-pandemic was not easy. Regardless, we were lucky enough to find the home of our dreams! We traded our one-bedroom apartment for a three-bedroom house with an additional office space, and we converted one of the rooms into another office. Now we can work with more than three feet of space between us and have our own offices. The past year has shown us how strong our relationship is. We have endured many hard situations and loss. We coped with these situations by going on long walks in open spaces, socially distanced from others. That was our time to disconnect from work and the world, talk, decompress, listen to one another, and even cry. It was how we bonded and recharged our energy to keep on going.

[CONT'D]

Left: Ana and Maria. Above: [Last Year's Issue of Connections](#)



Catching Up With Maria and Ana [Continued]

Have there been any surprising positive experiences over the past year, perhaps unexpected silver linings amidst the difficulties?

Yes, there have been. We have learned to live, laugh, and love to the fullest! And we learned to let the hard moments teach us the true value of family and friends, what they mean in our lives, and to never take a moment for granted.

You participated in our very first LGBTQ+ Pride issue last year (thank you!) and shared your remarkable story of military service, public service, and most of all--love. Did it feel meaningful to participate in Connections? Did you receive any feedback about last year's issue?

YES, IT WAS! Oh, we felt honored and excited when we were asked to be a part of last year's LGBTQ+ Pride issue! We got to share our story with everyone and the volume of (not just feedback) but LOVE that we still receive has been amazing, heartfelt, and so gratifying to know our story made an impact in other people's lives. The interview for the story was fun and a bit nerve-wracking, quite honestly, because we had never done an interview about our lives before and we didn't know what to expect, but once the interview with Steve and Abby started, we knew it would be an awesome and fun experience!

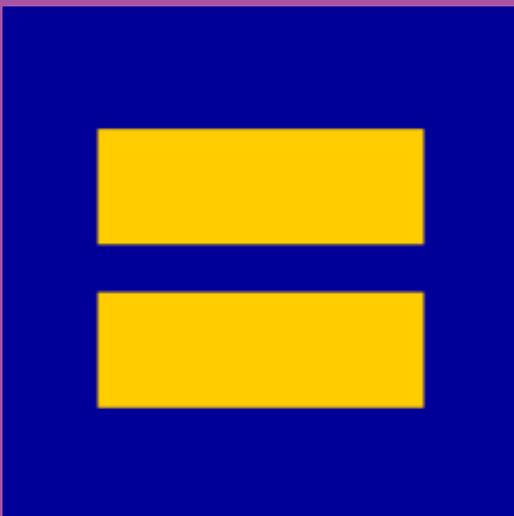
Is there anything to which you're looking forward together as we (hopefully) continue to move in a positive direction with the pandemic and life resembling a little more what we might consider "normal?"

Yes, we are very much looking forward to taking some time off soon to enjoy the summertime here in colorful Colorado. We



love outdoor walks, and we cannot wait to start our hiking adventures this year and visit as many National and State Parks as we can!

Above: Ana and Maria last Christmas.



Resources for Allies, Friends and Advocacy

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) is the largest LGBTQ+ advocacy group in the United States. HRC envisions a world where every member of the LGBTQ+ family has the freedom to live their truth without fear, and with equality under the law. HRC empowers their three million members and supporters to mobilize against attacks on the most marginalized people in our community. HRC provides exemplary resources for everyone interested in supporting the LGBTQ+ community:

[Allies](#) [Bisexual](#) [College](#) [Coming Out](#) [Communities of Color](#)
[Elections](#) [Hate Crimes](#) [Health & Aging](#) [International](#) [Laws & Legislation](#) [LGBTQ Youth](#) [Parenting](#) [Religion & Faith](#)
[Transgender](#) [Workplace](#) [Recursos en Español](#)

Ethan Taylor: Creating a Family Together

[Editor's note: Ethan Taylor (he/him), Team Lead for Africa/Europe with DOI's International Technical Assistance Program in Washington, D.C., has created a beautiful family with his husband, Jim Walker, through international adoption.]

In the spring of 2018, Ethan saw a post on Facebook about [Kidsave](#), an organization that brings older children from Colombia to the United States through its [Summer Miracles](#) program. Children stay with host families to learn about U.S. culture and experience life with an American family. At the end of the visit, some families may decide to adopt a child from the program.

Ethan mentioned the post to his then partner, now husband, Jim, who had often talked about being a father.

"I showed the post to Jim," said Ethan. "We looked at each other and said, 'Let's do this!' Next thing we know, we're signed up to host an adorable 13-year-old boy, Juan Carlos."

Upon his arrival at the airport, Juan Carlos ran up to his host fathers and sister, gave them big hugs, and presented each of them with braided bracelets from his home country.

"Right then and there, we fell in love with Juan Carlos and knew we were going to adopt him," said Jim.

Children participating in the Summer Miracles program may or may not know adoption is a possibility, but host families aren't allowed to talk openly about it during the visit. At the end of the hosting period, the children return to Colombia. If a family wants to adopt the child, they meet with an adoption agency to start the formal process.

[Children's Home](#) has a longstanding international adoption program with Colombia and partners with Kidsave to provide



host families with education, background checks, a hosting assessment and support.

"We felt like we won the lottery when we got to work with Children's Home," said Ethan. "From day one, everyone was kind, encouraging and helpful."

[CONT'D]

Above: The Walker-Taylor family at Ethan and Jim's wedding, September 2019. The flowers and bow ties are in the colors of the Colombian flag.

From Hosting to Adoption (Continued)

“There were many months we couldn’t talk to Juan Carlos until our letter of intent was accepted by the officials in Colombia,” said Jim. “After that step, we could Skype with him every two weeks but we still couldn’t talk to him about adoption.”

Waiting for the official referral to adopt Juan Carlos was stressful. To their great relief, Jim and Ethan received approval to adopt in early 2019. Jim, Ethan, and Isabella, Ethan’s

daughter from a previous relationship, traveled to Colombia to welcome Juan Carlos into the family.

Now 16 years old, Juan Carlos is adjusting well to life as an American teenager.

“Every night, when I tuck him into bed, the smile on his face says everything. Being his dad is a dream come true,” said Jim.



Above: The Walker-Taylor family enjoying a Nats Night Out game. Left to right: Jim Walker, Juan Carlos Walker-Taylor, Bella Cavey Walker-Taylor, Ethan Taylor.

Children’s Home, the organization that facilitated Ethan and Jim’s adoption of Juan Carlos, was recognized by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) as an Innovator in LGBTQ+ inclusion. The HRC Innovator Seal is the highest level of recognition for agencies that have implemented innovative approaches to inclusion in policy, partnerships, professional development and services to LGBTQ+ youth and prospective parents. This work could not be more important. LGBTQ+ youth are over-represented in foster care and face increased risk of both negative experiences and outcomes.

According to HRC, LGBTQ+ youth:

- Are twice as likely to report being treated poorly as their non-LGBTQ+ peers while in care
- Have a greater average number of placements than their non-LGBTQ+ peers
- Are more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ peers to be placed in congregate care, including group homes



Two Spirit: A Sacred Gift

By Abigail T. True, Writer/Editor, AVSO

Hundreds of years ago, before European contact, many North American Indigenous communities accepted and revered individuals who lived outside the boundaries of binary gender roles. Considered a third (or even fourth or fifth gender), these individuals were celebrated for their unique contributions to the society in which they lived. While most Indigenous communities have their own terms for these individuals in their Native language (e.g., *winkte* to the Lakota, *nadleeh* among the Navajo, *lhamana* to the Zuni), today they are widely known as Two Spirit.

The term Two Spirit was first coined in 1990 at an LGBTQ+ gathering near Winnipeg, Canada in an effort to create a collective, non-pejorative term. Older terms used by Europeans, such as *berdache* (a word of French origin referring to a passive male homosexual) were considered offensive and not to be used. While Two Spirit people are under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, being Two Spirit is less about sexual orientation and more about gender expression. In the past, female-bodied Two Spirit people might wear male clothing, marry non-Two Spirit females, and act as warriors, hunters, and horseback riders—even becoming chiefs. Male-bodied Two Spirit people would similarly cross gender roles, wearing female clothing, keeping house, excelling in the arts,



We'wha. Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institution

such as sewing or weaving, creating ceramics and leather goods. But both male- and female-bodied Two Spirit people could move fluidly between gender roles without restriction—an ability that set them apart from non-Two Spirit people.

Historically, as in many cultures the world over, gender-variant members of Indigenous societies were highly regarded and thought to possess a sacred gift—the ability to *see life* through the eyes of both genders. Able to combine and balance both male and

female essences, Two Spirit people were seen as extraordinary and especially in touch with the spiritual realm. Honored members of the tribal community, Two Spirit people often served significant and nuanced roles within their communities, such as matchmakers, mediators, teachers, leaders of tribal ceremony, healers, conveyers of oral tradition and song, foretellers of the future, conferrers of lucky names, and skilled artisans. To be Two Spirit was to carry great spiritual responsibility and be a guiding force for other tribal members.

The Zuni *lhamana* were male-bodied but wore women's clothing and performed traditionally female roles, such as weaving, pottery-making and cooking. However, they also might choose to participate in traditionally male activities, such as hunting and warfare. One of the most historically well-known Two Spirit individuals was a Zuni *lhamana* named We'wha [*pictured, above and left*].

We'wha (1849-1896) was a talented potter and weaver and gained a degree of national celebrity when she befriended anthropologist [Matilda Coxe Stevenson](#) and traveled to Washington, D.C with Stevenson in 1886 as an ambassador for the Zuni tribe.

[CONT'D]



We'wha. Photo by John K. Hillers

Two Spirit: A Sacred Gift [Continued]

In Washington, D.C., We'wha demonstrated weaving at the Smithsonian Institution, appeared at the National Theater, and even met President Grover Cleveland. We'wha is the subject of many articles, photographs, and a book, [The Zuni Man-Woman](#), by Will Roscoe.

Another well-known Two Spirit person was Osh-Tisch *[pictured below with their spouse]*, a leading **baté** (male-bodied Two Spirit) of the Crow tribe. Osh-Tisch took on both traditional male and female roles and excelled at both. Osh-Tisch was known as both an amazingly talented sewer and also as a ferocious warrior. Their strength in battle is what earned them their name, “Osh-Tisch,” which translates to “Finds Them and Kills Them All.” Osh-Tisch had a lodge, a family, and was a leader among the Crow. Unfortunately, with the coming of European colonizers and missionaries, traditional Western societal norms predominated, including the oppression of the **baté**. Osh-Tisch was one of the last known **baté** for a long time as Two Spirit traditions began to vanish.

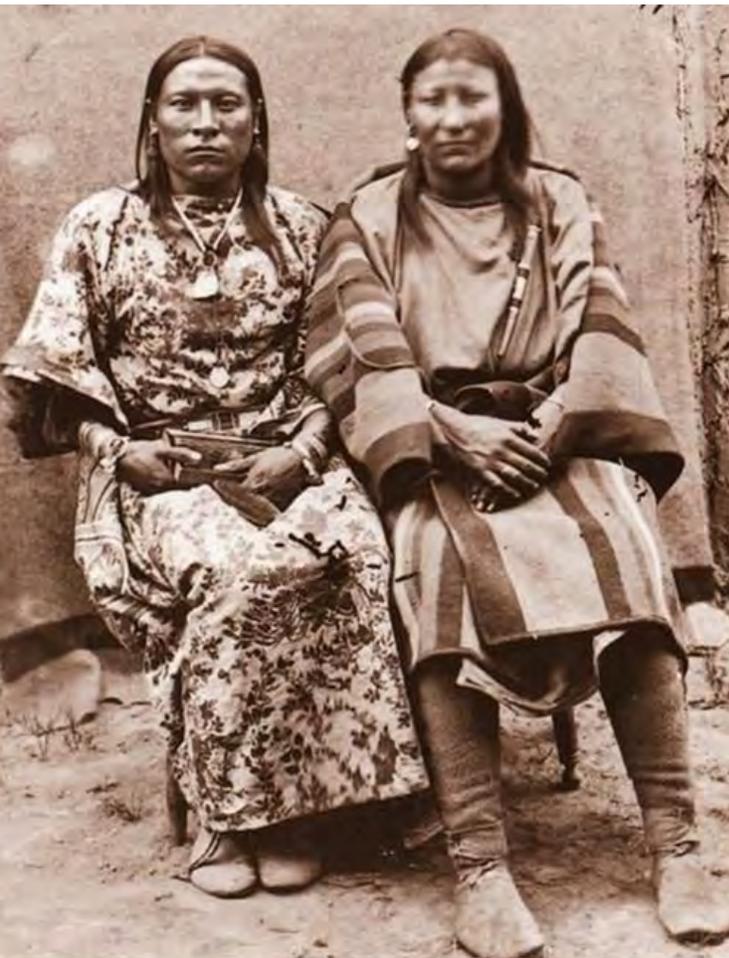
Unfortunately, it was a common tale not only among Native American Two Spirit people, but among gender-variant individuals all over the world throughout time: with the coming of colonizers and outside forces, any alternative to



binary gender norms was ruthlessly oppressed. Among the Indigenous communities of North America, as a direct result of conquest and disease, missionaries, boarding schools, and efforts by the U.S. government to assimilate Native Americans, Two Spirit roles and traditions were condemned and lost, like many Native American traditions. Over time, Two Spirit people faded from view, either by forced dissolution or by being hidden—out of love and protection—by their own communities.

Today, Native people throughout North America are reviving the Two Spirit role and its traditions. Despite the deep sadness of this story, there is something that stirs within the heart, a comforting realization that there is nothing “New Age” about the notion of gender fluidity. It is ancient. It was a profoundly important and recognized role for people to play in society beginning thousands of years ago. And it was treasured. Two Spirit people were not judged based on gender or sexuality. A person was valued for their contributions to their tribe and by their character, as they should be. Two Spirit people were and still are worthy of respect and celebration.

Resources abound for anyone interested in delving further into the history, traditions, and important roles that Two Spirit people play, including how they are celebrated today. Resources include a comprehensive discussion of Two Spirit from the [Indian Health Service](#). Pictured, left: Osh-Tisch and their spouse. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution. Pictured, above: Karen Harrison puts the finishing touches on her granddaughter Summer Rose Harrison-Little Cloud's braids, preparing her to dance at the Ninth Annual Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirit Powwow, held February 8, 2020, at Fort Mason Festival Pavilion in San Francisco. Photo credit: Carly Wipf



★ VETERAN SPOTLIGHT ★



AJ Legault

Sergeant, U.S. Army

Don't Ask Don't Tell was an obstacle in my military career. It forced me to hide who I truly was.

I knew I was gay as a young teen. Enlisting in the U.S. Army right out of high school in 1987, I was not looking to deny myself the opportunities offered by military service. I wanted to serve my country. I wanted to travel. I wanted to grow and discover my strengths. So I lied when asked if I was homosexual. From my first days as a Private, and my final ones as a Sergeant, I hid my sexuality for eight years. I did not date or frequent any place that could raise suspicion. Looking back, I am furious at the losses: the loss of possible romance and relationships and the loss of deeper friendships as I always had that part of me "locked away." I was a spectacular soldier and was recognized for my accomplishments.

I served with jungle units in Panama, an M1 Tank unit in Ft. Benning, GA and Desert Storm, and a Patriot Missile unit in Germany and Texas. The military helped me grow as an adult and helped me discover a confidence within myself. Airborne School was something I thought I could never do. Jumping out of that airplane was an exhilarating experience!



I made the decision in 1995 to separate from military service. The dogs of Don't Ask Don't Tell were barking heavily at my door. I resented how my personal life (or lack of) was potential grounds to discharge me from the military. After eight years and a few months, I packed my things to leave.

On my way home I stopped at a couple National Park Service locations. They brought back wonderful memories of growing up in Salem, MA and the Salem Maritime National Historic Site. A couple of years later I applied for a seasonal position at Grand Canyon National Park and got the job. **[CONT'D]**

HONOR ★ VALOR ★ SERVICE

The DOI Veterans Resource Group is here for you. Please reach out to doi_vets@ios.doi.gov

Veteran Spotlight: AJ Legault (Continued)



[Grand Canyon](#) was amazing! It was during the summer of 1999 that I found my destiny. Staying with the NPS, I enjoyed my first years at Grand Canyon and worked with phenomenal people. It was during this time I officially “came out” publicly. A visit from an investigator looking into a bogus rumor helped with this decision. With my military background I stood tall with my newfound rainbow persona. My U.S. flag outside my house was replaced with a “New Glory” rainbow flag. My car had a [Human Rights Campaign](#) bumper sticker. I attended PRIDE Festivals and sought to participate in an official NPS capacity. My attendance at the [Millennium March on Washington](#) in 2000 was a huge moment for me. I was then motivated to volunteer with several LGBT organizations and lobbied my elected officials for marriage equality and the right for LGBT people to serve openly in the military.

In 2004 I became a law enforcement ranger and graduated from the [Federal Law Enforcement Training Center](#) in 2005.

St. Augustine, FL, is where I met my future husband, Jason Curtis. After a few years together we moved to California so we could marry. The same week we arrived, [Proposition 8](#) was passed, which struck down gay marriage in California.

The following year we moved to Western Nebraska, where I started work at [Scotts Bluff National Monument](#). In the summer of 2011, we had a commitment

ceremony at the monument attended by family and friends. This was the first LGBT ceremony ever held at the monument. Since marriage equality was not nationwide, we travelled to Iowa for a courthouse marriage ceremony. Even though the summer ceremony was not an official marriage ceremony, it was attended by close family and friends, so we view it as our marriage ceremony. Possession is nine-tenths of the law!

The Monday after the Supreme Court held in 2015 that the fundamental right to marry is guaranteed by the Constitution ([Obergefell v. Hodges](#)), I called our benefits office to add my husband on my insurance and so on. The benefits office was ready and eager to help.

With military and NPS time combined, I have been a U.S. Government employee for 30 years.

“I loved serving my country as a uniformed soldier. I love serving my country as an openly gay National Park Ranger even more!”



AJ and his husband Jason Curtis, an NPS seasonal maintenance worker.

Meryland Cuevas-Canela (she/her)



I am a new employee at NPS and I am excited to see the LGBTQ+ community thriving here! I serve as the Administrative Support Assistant for the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in Orange, NJ.

From 2010 to 2013 I was a member of the diversity committee as the LGBTQ+ advocate for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the San Juan, Puerto Rico, district office. In 2012 I was awarded the Diversity In Action Award from the region for my work in inclusion and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ members of the agency. I was also elected as President of FDA Globe, the LGBTQ+ organization for the Food and Drug Administration employees.

I became a member of the Board of Directors of [FedQ](#), which is the national affinity organization for all LGBTQ+ federal employees and allies. In Puerto Rico, my advocacy work also included being part of the Board of Directors of the first LGBTQ+ community center in San Juan.

I am a survivor of domestic violence in a same-sex relationship and I have used my experience to bring light to this issue in our community.



I published a book about my story and have spoken publicly at multiple LGBTQ+ and domestic violence survivor events about the dangers of invisibility among the LGBTQ+ community when it comes to seeking help for domestic violence and abuse. I have been involved in multiple efforts to advocate for inclusion, equality and visibility for our community and continue to be a strong voice for change.



[Thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org)

Call 1-800-799-SAFE

Text "START" to 88788

While abuse among LGBTQ+ people occurs at the same rates and in similar ways as their

cisgender, heterosexual peers, LGBTQ+ people may face forms of abuse or barriers to accessing support specifically based on prejudices against their gender expression or sexuality:

- *Fear of isolation or ostracization from your family or community. Shame or embarrassment around identity.*

- *Fear of not receiving services because of discrimination or stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people or relationships used to minimize the abuse you're experiencing.*
- *Legal protections that vary state by state affecting your ability or willingness to seek legal recourse against your abusive partner.*

For almost 25 years, the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) has provided essential tools and support to help survivors of domestic violence so they can live their lives free of abuse. Those who contact The Hotline can expect highly-trained, expert advocates to offer free, confidential, and compassionate support, crisis intervention information, education, and referral services in over 200 languages.

My Friend Michael Groomer

**By Barbara Green, Equal Opportunity Manager,
NPS Alaska Regional Office**

Editor's Note: Connections Team member Barbara Green conducted a wide-ranging, deeply heartfelt interview with her dear friend, Michael Groomer, who serves as the EEO Complaints Manager for the Midwest Regions of NPS.

Here's an excerpt. [Read the entire article here.](#)

Michael, what does Pride Month mean to you?

If we were in person, I wouldn't be able to get through this without crying.

Pride Month for me is very hard due to strong mixed emotions. I appreciate the community has come to the point where they can openly march and celebrate who we are and how far we've come. It's a time to look toward the future and be joyful. It's also a time to remember those who fought against the bigotry and discrimination in order to make the world a better place for the LGBTQ+ community.

For me, however, it's a very sad reminder of the atrocities of the Eighties and the many people who died from AIDS. I see the openly gay youth of today and wonder if many of them know about the sacrifices that were made by the previous generations in order for them to have the freedom to express themselves like they can today. I equate it to visiting a war memorial and reading the names of the soldiers who died and reading the quotes about freedom and liberty. I can't help but see some of the celebrations now and feel like some of the celebrants are missing the overall point. It may be a celebration of our freedom, yet it is also a commemoration of our fallen. Like so many other gay men coming of age in the Eighties, I watched countless numbers of the community die from an illness for which there was no cure.

I lost my partner, Eduardo (Eddie), in 1987 to AIDS and it devastated me. It devastated me because he was HIV positive the entire time I was with him and I didn't know. Either he didn't tell me, or he didn't know it himself, but I was exposed. Eddie died but I didn't. I left Mexico City a very broken and scared man with two suitcases of what I could bring from our apartment. What followed were routine HIV tests that always brought the fear back again, but each time I tested negative and that remains the same today. I'm not sure why or how I



survived but it wasn't in vain. Eddie was a beautiful young man who had so much to offer the world. He remains very much in my thoughts and dreams.

Pride Month brings Eddie back to me each year, along with all of the emotions I experienced for years after his death. I didn't talk about him for a long time after that happened. I guess I was afraid of what others would think about me. I remember being invited to a church service not long after Eddie died. The preacher told a story from the Bible but instead of saying leprosy, he substituted that word with AIDS instead. He continuously said that and he also said AIDS was a curse from God on the unclean sinner, the homosexuals who are all going to hell. I got up, walked out, and never went back. I cried all the way home.

What are you most passionate about? What brings you joy?

Even though I'm an introvert, I am most passionate about meeting new people and hearing their stories. Everyone has a story to share and I'm honored when they share them with me. I can go into the convenience store to pay for gas and come out 10 minutes later knowing all about the messy divorce the clerk is going through. People just open up to me. I think a lot of that has to do with learning to be comfortable with who I am as a person. I attribute that directly to my experiences as a gay man. I've learned how to meet people where they are, with no judgement, and with total openness for them to feel safe in sharing.

[CONT'D]

Michael Groomer (Continued)

After years of being on the receiving end of condemnation and judgment from others, it has taught me how to be completely the opposite. I go out of my way to create a safe zone where they can be open and not feel any condemnation and judgment coming from me.

What are you most proud of?

I'm most proud of the person I've become today. I honestly did not think I'd live to see middle age. My life has been filled with one landmine after another and I had to learn to walk cautiously with each step. At any point along the way I could have "stopped the clock" and chosen to remain a victim. I didn't

do that, and at each of the darkest points, there was someone there to help me move on, learn, and grow.

Mark Twain said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." I fully believe that. I don't understand the path I've been given but I'm proud that I've walked it the best I could and have now arrived at a place where I can possibly help make others' lives be a little more joyful. Suffering and the resulting growth should never be in vain.

[Read Barbara Green's entire interview with Michael Groomer here.](#)



Barbara Green

By doing the work to
love ourselves more,
I believe we will love
each other better.

- Laverne Cox

Pronouns and Respect

By Kim Oliver (she/her), Diversity and Inclusion Strategist,
Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights

Pronoun usage is an important part of a person's identity because it's one way that we refer to each other. It's also something that many of us give very little thought or consideration to. We typically see or hear an individual, assume their gender based on visual, verbal, or written cues, and begin associating that person with the gender we assign them. This assumptive and unintentional process can be problematic, because we aren't always correct.

A person does not need to look or sound a certain way to demonstrate the gender they are or are not. I choose to specify my preferred pronouns in my email signature block to be more inclusive and bring awareness about the importance of respecting every individual's pronoun preference.



David Hockney

One of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, **David Hockney**, who is gay, celebrates Los Angeles landscapes and the particular quality of light that floods the area. On November 15, 2018, Hockney's 1972 work *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)* [pictured, left] sold at Christie's auction house in New York City for \$90 million, becoming the most expensive artwork by a living artist sold at auction at the time. [Learn more about Hockney here.](#)

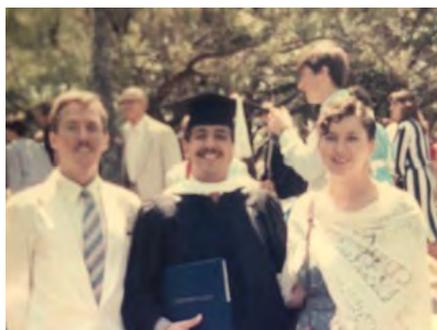


Left: *Dancers VIII* by David Hockney; above: Hockney photographed on his deck in Beverly Hills, CA.

Matthew, Billy and Me: Love, Pride and Self-Acceptance

By **Tonianne Baca-Green, J.D.**

Mindfulness practices involve a willingness to be with ourselves as we are. The simple definition I often give in my mindfulness classes is “paying attention to the present moment without judgment.” Can I allow what is to simply be what it is? Can I be present in this moment without pushing reality away (not this!) or clinging desperately to it (just this and only this!)? This non-judgement is inherently compassionate, and why mindfulness is compassion and non-judgement is the beating heart of LGBTQ+ Pride. Love is love.



In 1984 and 1985, I was working as a stage manager intern at the Dallas Theatre Center, recently graduated from college and all alone in the world.

My family was in New Mexico, my college friends had all left town. I was a glorified stagehand, moving furniture, sweeping the floor and prompting actors their forgotten lines. Matt and Billy opened their world to me. They were the warm, bright spot in my life at that time. They allowed me to be who I was: a straight, chubby theater nerd, and brought joy and acceptance to me too.

Matthew was a college friend who met Billy in New York City's Greenwich Village the previous summer. They were out gay men (to the extent one could be in those days). Billy moved to Dallas to live with Matt, leaving his rent-controlled Village apartment to move to Texas (now that is love!). I was the odd man out (odd woman of course), and despite my obvious flaws they loved and welcomed me anyway. They took me to bars at some risk to their own street cred, and I invited them to cookouts at my small apartment with a hibachi and vodka/limeade cocktails (you could get ten cans of limeade concentrate for a buck!). We had a blast.

It was an interesting irony for me to have lived the experience of being the “wrong way” in that gay community, and yet being loved and accepted intentionally by them, not despite my “wrongness” but inclusive of it. I wasn't wrong, I was me and I

was beloved. That acceptance, just like the light and warmth of the sun against a tight flower bud, encouraged me to open my heart and give to the world all the beauty there. This was the beginning of my path to mindful self-acceptance and compassion. After all, if your compassion does not include yourself, it is not truly compassion.

I left Dallas the day after our last barbecue on the fourth of July. I went home to Albuquerque to eventually begin law school. Matt taught high school drama and was fired for telling a gay joke (ugh!). He got another job and directed plays. Billy worked at the Dallas Morning News. They got a better apartment and a cocker spaniel puppy. I visited a few times and our friendship continued to flower. I loved those guys.

In my first year of law school Billy died from AIDS-related complications. I didn't even know he was sick. In those days, some things were still pushed way back in the closet. I cried for a week. I eventually moved to D.C. and started my federal career and then the word came that Matt had also succumbed to AIDS. They were both in their twenties. They didn't get to see marriage equality or have fabulous careers or kids of their own. They would be so happy to know that they could do all that now. They did live, though. They lived large and loving lives and will never be forgotten.

The lines of [Hafez's](#) poem bring them to mind:

How did the rose/ever open its heart/ and give to this world all of its beauty?

*It felt the encouragement of light against its being/
Otherwise, we all remain too frightened.*

Love is love.

Tonianne Baca-Green, J.D., is a Mindfulness and Compassionate Leadership trainer and attorney within OHA. She is also a mediator and a coach. Tonianne welcomes your questions and comments. She may be reached at Tonianne.Baca-Green@bia.gov.

Pictured left to right: Billy, Matthew and Tonianne at Matthew's graduation.





Special Section: DOI Pride!



Meet just a few of the amazing people of Interior who identify as LGBTQ+. Enjoy!



Joshua Ream, Regional Subsistence Program Manager, NPS, Anchorage, AK

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

While I have been incredibly fortunate thus far in my federal career, my greatest success was probably being selected for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Stepping Up to Leadership (SUTL) program back in 2017. SUTL was life changing in so many ways. It helped me to grow as a leader, to recognize my inherent strengths (and weaknesses), and to overcome adversity. Through SUTL I developed a personal leadership philosophy that I strive to apply in both my professional and personal life. It helped me to embrace who I am, and to be proud of it. Perhaps most importantly I acquired a nationwide network of friends and colleagues that continue to support each other in our careers.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

It is hard to identify a specific moment of first feeling prideful. I think for a lot of people this occurs along a spectrum. For me, there was a decades-long transition from embarrassment and guilt, to pride. If I had to select a moment in which pride overcame negativity, it would probably be under the alter on my wedding day. At that point I didn’t care anymore what others thought or felt; that day was about the two of us and our shared love. I felt proud to have an opportunity that so many people fought so long and so hard to make possible.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

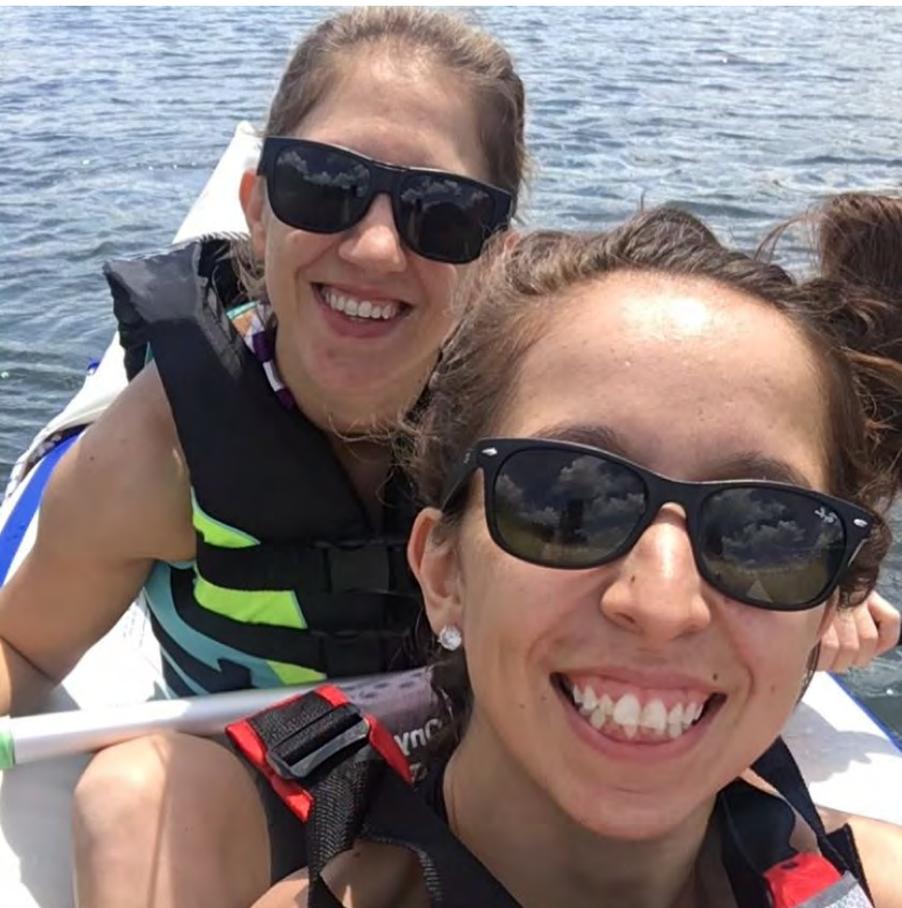
This might sound a bit cliché but if we are including allies in this question, I’d have to say President Obama, even though I don’t know him personally. Through his leadership, his passion, and his values I was consistently inspired and given hope. I felt as though there was someone at the top that cared, that was willing to work hard to make positive change, and that saw the struggles and pain of minorities. To see the images of the Whitehouse lit up in a rainbow following the SCOTUS marriage decision brought forth a flood of joyful tears. And then to learn that Michelle and Malia snuck out of the Whitehouse that night to celebrate with the crowds...it was a true moment of affirmation.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Get involved and be yourself. Be proud. DOI is incredibly supportive of our community, but real change is driven from within. We need to stay diligent, to do our part, and not just sit on the sidelines. Even before becoming a federal employee I was amazed to see NPS represented annually in Anchorage’s pride festival activities, including the parade. Later, the Fish and Wildlife Service also jumped on board! Seeing your employer’s actions, especially those that affirm our humanity, is a wonderful feeling.



Top: Joshua holding a Wood Frog captured at Petersburg, AK, May 2021. Above: Joshua conducting herpetological inventories on the Stikine River, May 2021



Brittany Gonzalez, Supervisory HR Specialist, IBC, Lakewood, CO

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

I started with DOI as a high school student and 15 years later, I'm still here! I've been fortunate to work on some great projects with the IBC and work with amazing people!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I'm always prideful of my identity and love to brag about my wife :)

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

DOI is a wonderful agency to work for and in my opinion has one of the most diverse portfolio of career paths in any federal agency. There is something for everyone here! DOI and Secretary Haaland are very supportive of all diversity, equity and inclusion events including Pride month!

Rae Noble, Administrative Support Assistant, BLM, South Coast Field Office, Palm Springs, CA

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I don't remember which was the first time I felt pride but the one that sticks out is going to the DMV to change the gender on my drivers' license. I was worried that because not every auto insurer covers nonbinary individuals, that might create a problem with job requirements to drive government vehicles - however, the Federal government is self-insured so you won't get denied auto insurance coverage based on your gender!



**Daniel Winkler, Research Ecologist, USGS,
Southwest Biological Science Center, Moab, UT**

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

My greatest success has been bringing together teams of researchers within and outside USGS to produce exciting, relevant and impactful scientific publications and agency reports over the last few years. One climate change study was published in the journal *Functional Ecology* and was a finalist for the British Ecological Society's award for the best paper by an early career scientist. I coauthored this work with an amazing team of USGS scientists and, together, we sought to understand how an ecologically, culturally, and economically important plant species (Indian rice grass) may respond to global change. Recognition for work is relatively rare in the research community and I was only able to accomplish this with the help of my great network at USGS!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

The day I came out as gay, nearly all my fear and self-doubt switched to feelings of pride. I have been fortunate to continue feeling prideful of my queer identity since that day. The path to equality is difficult and there is still a long way to go. I hope that as we in the LGBTQ+ community find our footing on this path that we can experience the wonderfulness of being proud of who we are.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My brother Jay. Standing in your truth as a queer person and embracing it is a challenge for a multitude of reasons, and my



brother Jay is one of only a few I know who stood strong in his truth at an early age despite experiencing hate, judgment, and a lack of acceptance and support. Jay continues to rise to these challenges and, for that, I will forever admire his strength and pride.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

I have worked at DOI as an intern, technician, student volunteer, and researcher over the past 10+ years and have always felt welcomed and safe. I think this is in part because public lands are owned by the American people, including the entire LGBTQIA+ community. USGS' Southwest Biological Science Center embraces this ethic of equality and community.



Arches National Park in Moab, Utah



Lauren Hazzard, Outdoor Recreation Planner, BLM, Rock Springs, WY

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

Landing this job! I'm just starting my permanent career with the BLM.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I definitely first felt prideful when I publicly came out at the age of 19 and was able to openly share and celebrate who I am.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

Anyone who was authentically themselves before I came out—seeing them live life and be happy inspired me to do the same.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

I am just joining myself, so I'm looking forward to seeing everyone else's advice!



Jesse Abernathy, Social Worker, BIA, Sacramento, CA

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

Being entrusted to meet the challenges of my position as my duties and responsibilities progressively increase with each new transition.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

Since childhood, I have felt a keen sense of who I truly am and the power that I have as a gay human being for making our shared existence truly just and equitable for all of us.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

I have an uncle who is now long gone to the Spirit World and who was never afraid to be himself in life. He might have been best described as transgender, although he may not have ever actually identified as being such an individual. Through his actions and his words and his self-assuredness, he became a central role model in my life, showing me the value of never suppressing our real selves.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Since joining DOI almost five years ago, I have never felt afraid or intimidated to present anything but my genuine self, nor have I ever been ashamed of who I am. I have experienced nothing but support, encouragement and respect as a DOI employee.



**Paula Gonzales, Ethics Specialist,
Office of the Solicitor,
Albuquerque, NM**

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

After only five years of federal employment, I was selected to serve as the Branch Chief, Employee-Labor Relations for the Pacific Northwest SHRO while stationed at Mt. Rainier National Park (MORA). As the Branch Chief, I provided ELR oversight for 17 National Parks and Recreation Areas. In the two years of working at MORA, I was able to enjoy the beautiful drive through the forest to my office and also had the pleasure of working with many wonderful NPS supervisors who also became friends. Although some of us have moved on and others retired, we keep in touch on Facebook. Our paths may not physically cross again, but we will always share a kindred love for our mountain.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I came from a very conservative background in California and although I had been bisexual all my life, I never discussed it with family or friends for fear of being ostracized. In 2010, I moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico and realized that it was just me and my Creator now - no more judgmental authorities looking over me. For the first time in my life, I was able to live as my authentic self. In October 2010, I attended a local National Coming Out Day ceremony and was able to "come out" of the closet without any shame.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

There are several who I could name as inspirational; however, for someone I personally know, it would be my pastor. She always knew she was a lesbian created specifically for an eternal purpose. She did not allow negative voices to keep her



from believing she was worthy of the unconditional love of our Creator. She has inspired me to live as my authentic self and not be afraid to pursue a loving relationship with my Creator, and His Son, Jesus Christ.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

The DOI is a welcoming and inclusive agency that encourages us to be our best selves.



Scott Pekalib, Administrative Operations Assistant, USGS, Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, Hilo, HI

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

Longevity. I have been in federal service most of my adult life. I joined the Navy right after high school, spending my time stationed at Pearl Harbor. I started my civil service career in the mail room at the Social Security Administration. From there I moved on to the Department of Veterans Affairs' Health System as a ward clerk. I worked my way up to Supervisory Medical Support Assistant. After six years with the VA in York, Pennsylvania I decided a change was in order and took a position as a carpenter's helper in Hawaii. I had told myself after returning from Hawaii in the 90s that I would come back. After a year at Hawaii Volcanos National Park I went back to administrative work with the U.S. Geological Survey in my current position. I now find myself about 10 years from retirement and proud to have served my country.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I felt pride in coming out. I was a late bloomer and did not identify as gay until I was 49. I was married and raised three wonderful children. "I am gay" are the three most powerful and prideful words to ever leave my mouth. But my most prideful moment was when I married my husband. Free to love and marry any person I choose regardless of what sex we are. You cannot help who you love.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My husband, Jay. He is Micronesian and from *Lamotrek*, a tiny island with only about 500 people. There they live off the land: no money, no electricity or running water. Their government is a village chief. My husband's language is only spoken on his island. They have no word for "gay." My husband Jay was the first from his island to identify as such. He left his island to come to the U.S. to be free. He faced immense pressure, intimidation and anger from villagers and his own family. Yet

he was not deterred from the desire to be himself and to love whom he chooses. We are married now, time has passed and he has opened the door to others on his island to be who they are. One cousin has moved to the U.S. and is also living openly because of what Jay did. The village accepts it now.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

I feel safe. I feel safe to say I am married to a fella. I feel safe to say his name at work. I feel safe to bring him to work functions. I feel safe in that the DOI seems to value that I have an important perspective as a gay man to add to conversations, moreover that my perspective is important and valued.





Jane Spangler, Sucker Recovery Biologist, USFWS, Klamath Falls, OR

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

I started as a Pathways Intern and have worked my way into a permanent Fish and Wildlife Biologist position in a state that I have dreamed about permanently living in. My greatest success has been joining the Lost River Sucker and Shortnose Sucker Recovery Team and the amount of satisfaction I get from having incredible coworkers and projects to work on. I am blown away by the passion that the staff I work with has for sucker recovery and I am motivated to make a difference and help move the needle to move Lost River and Shortnose Suckers from being listed under the ESA.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

When I attended my first PRIDE with my then girlfriend and my current wife in Fayetteville, AR. I finally felt free to be queer and was surrounded by so much love.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My wife and her large group of queer female friends have inspired me to be true to who I am and to stand up to others' condemnations. I used

to just ignore comments from people that made me feel less than, but I was encouraged by my wife and her friends to politely and confidently speak my truth.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

For me I like to keep my personal info to myself until I can feel out the folks I work with. Some people have a misconception about queer folks and when they meet you if that's the first personal thing they find out they may be less inclined to show you the respect you deserve. I like to show people my strengths and my commitment to being a good co-worker before letting them know I'm married to a woman. I think this can help change attitudes because if someone is anti-queer, yet like you as a person and co-worker and then find out your preferences, it can really help open their minds.





Scott Andrew Taylor, Visual Information Specialist, NPS, Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park, Sequoia, CA

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

In Shenandoah National Park, I was able to create a series of videos highlighting our night skies. It was the most fulfilling and fun work I've done because I got to share information on what I'm most passionate about: stars!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

Leaving behind a homophobic family, I joined the Air Force under DADT. It soon ended, and LGBT Pride month became officially instated by the DoD. I had a very supportive friend group, coworkers, and now the entire Air Force accepted

me as I was. That was huge, especially after years of hiding it. For the first time, I was allowed to take PRIDE in who I was.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

When I was dealing with difficult trauma in my personal life, my boss was the only person that I truly felt supported by. They listened to me, tried to understand, and truly offered help in the most meaningful ways possible. The support I received was vital, and I will be forever grateful. I was partly dealing with coming to terms with myself as a gay man, which admittedly at the time, felt weird coming out to what I thought was a cisgender straight guy. It wasn't until after my boss got out of the military (under Don't Ask Don't Tell), that they were able to reveal their true identity as a trans person. I was so inspired and encouraged to be my true self after they set such an incredible example for me.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

It's 2021! Don't be afraid to be yourself! The DOI is a welcoming and friendly environment to all.



Above: Scott and the Pride Committee at Incirlik Air Force Base, Turkey in 2015. They are standing in front of their exhibit highlighting famous people in the LGBTQ+ community throughout history. "It was designed to speak to how the LGBTQ+ community has been here all throughout history, even if it's only been culturally accepted and open in more recent years," says Scott. Left to right: Scott Andrew Taylor, Michael Battles, Madi Sylvester, Cambria Ferguson, Marcus Ferguson.

Right: Check out Scott's masterful video explaining the night skies over Shenandoah National Park: <https://youtu.be/62n6hollbsQ>



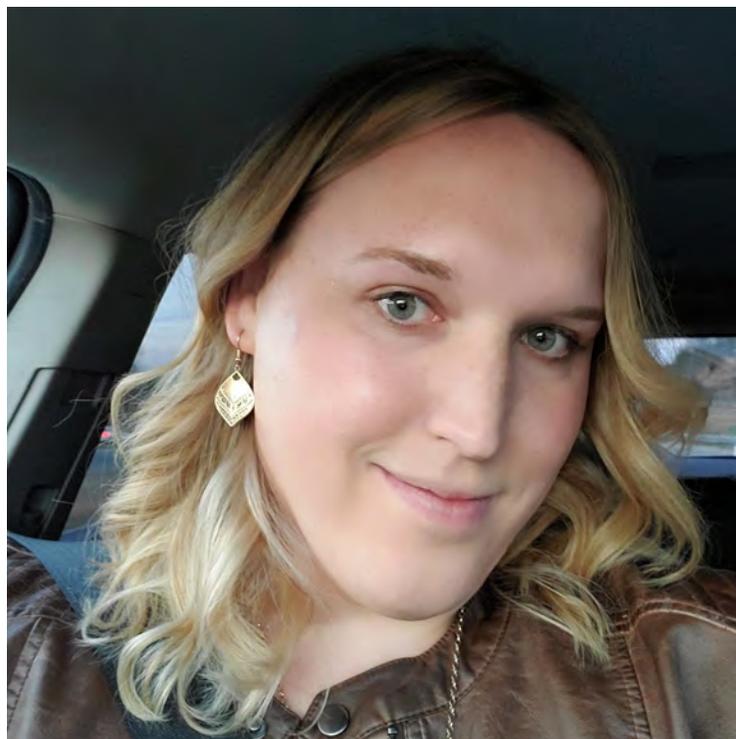
Cris Candice Tuck, Physical Scientist, National Minerals Information Center, USGS, Reston, VA

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

My greatest accomplishment was being able to work with our management team to modernize some of our systems and processes. In 2015, I developed software using the already available Google Drive to create a document management and routing system that allowed our science center to track, route, and peer review over 700 publications per year. This system improved data quality, timeliness, and communication. In 2017, I put pen to paper on an idea for a global mineral production database, called OneWorld, for which I developed the policies and procedures alongside some talented colleagues and helped program it. It helped spur communication and data improvements across the groups within our science center that we had never achieved before. We continue to use these systems today to improve our publications. I hope to do more development work in the future!

What was the moment when you first felt proud of your LGBTQ+ identity?

There are so many moments, it's hard to pick one. But I think the best was this last weekend. My daughter turned eight in December, but we couldn't throw her a party with her friends because of COVID-19. She told me she had to have her friends or it wouldn't be the same; she is so close with her friends. So we threw her a surprise birthday party. I am genderfluid, so I may present as masculine some days and feminine others. Some of her friends and their parents knew I was transgender, others didn't. Most hadn't seen me presenting as female before. But I wore the prettiest sundress I could find and was so nervous. My daughter came up to me during the party to thank me for everything. I asked her if she was worried about her friends seeing me in a dress, and she confidently told me no way! One of her friends even wanted to know where her "dad" was because she didn't recognize me. My daughter proudly told her I was the one in a dress because I was transgender and her friends couldn't have cared less. I am proud to help normalize the trans community so much that today's kids can see loving parents come in all forms.



Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

In my early years, I was at a trans support meeting. I met a lot of interesting people there, but one woman stood out to me. Her name was Pat and she was 84. She had been married, had children, had grandchildren, and lived an incredible life as the gender she was assigned at birth (male). But she told us all that in her late age, she knew she could not go to the grave as someone she wasn't really. She had known all her life she was meant to be a woman and came out to her wife. Her wife had also come with her to the meeting and was so supportive. It really gave me hope for my wife and me. To see someone ready to fulfill their innermost truth, at that age and despite all the challenges it would bring, was one of the most inspiring moments of my life. I still use her example to help young trans people who are struggling today.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

The Department of the Interior is such an incredible place to work! It is already filled with diversity and almost everyone I have met in my journey has been open-minded and accepting. It can be so daunting trying to find an accepting workplace, friends and a community that will embrace you. But through my friends and colleagues at work, I was able to find peace of mind in being myself. I owe my colleagues and management my gratitude for all their support over the years!



Sierra Franks, Regulatory Program Branch Chief, Marine Mammals Management, FWS, Anchorage, AK

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

Probably just meeting all of the amazing people employed by the federal government. I have had the privilege to work in three separate federal agencies in four different states while climbing the career ladder over the years. Seeing each agency's mission play out in day-to-day work has been the most rewarding.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I think I first felt prideful when attending my first PRIDE event during undergraduate school in Honolulu, Hawaii. It was the first time I had ever been surrounded by so many people who were similar to how I identify.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

For me, probably Melissa Etheridge. I grew up in northwest Missouri, not far from where she grew up in northeast Kansas. There was really no material then to read, watch or hear from other gay women. I remember listening to her CDs and analyzing the lyrics so closely. I also read everything in her memoir. I could relate to Melissa Etheridge the most as I was starting the process of learning who I was personally before coming out.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

I would say to be your true and authentic self. There is power in the confidence of knowing and owning who you are.

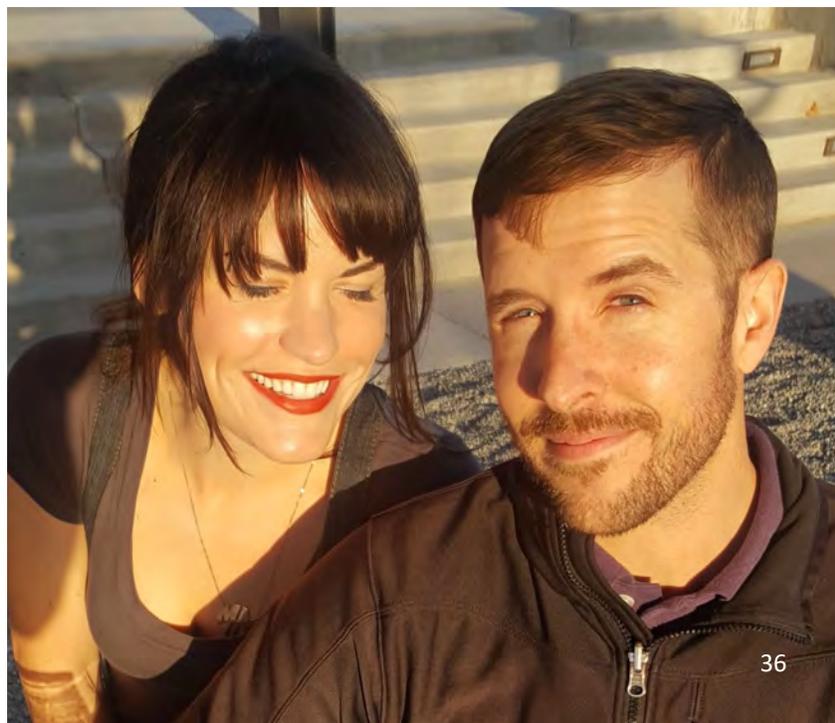
Abigail T. True, Writer/Editor, AVSO, Lakewood, CO

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I am proud of my brother every day.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My twin brother, Ross. We grew up in a home where sexuality was never talked about. Even crushes or interest in boys or girls was never talked about. Ross knew he was gay from a very young age and carried that secret with him until he went to college. Ross has helped my parents and our extended family to be more open about discussing sexual orientation and accepting of the queer community.





Pat Schmidt, Park Ranger, NPS, Fort Smith National Historic Site, Fort Smith, AR

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

So far, I would say being the 2017 Midwest Region [Freeman Tilden Award](#) Recipient.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I was working in the gallery at the park, preparing it for the next temporary exhibit. I had my iPod playing music in the background. My supervisor came in to help. At one point, he stopped what he was doing and asked, "Is that a lesbian love song?" I stopped and listened for a moment and responded, "Yes." I told him the name of the song and the artists." He said, "Okay," and went back to what he was doing. It was no big deal.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

I am most inspired by every member of the LGBTQIA+ who lives life as who they are without apologies. They are the people who put a face to our community, while at the same time they are supportive of others in the community.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Be the best you that you can be and believe in yourself. You were hired because someone thinks you can do the job. If you need help, ask for it, and be there for your coworkers. Take advantage of and seek out training opportunities to grow as a professional, a person, and a leader within the DOI and your agency. You never know what opportunities will arise from them.

“Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.” - Freeman Tilden

The Freeman Tilden Award is the highest award presented to an individual National Park Service interpreter. Since 1981, the award is presented annually and recognizes outstanding contributions to the practice of interpretation and education by an NPS employee. The award was created to stimulate and reward creative thinking that results in positive impacts upon the preservation of the parks and the visiting public. The award is named for [Freeman Tilden](#) [pictured, right], who has inspired generations of interpreters across the world and whose book Interpreting Our Heritage continues to be a definitive text for the discipline. Photo NPS.





Above: Cody, left, and his fiancé Keith.

Right: "The running of the interns" upon the announcement of a Supreme Court decision. Below: outside the Supreme Court on June 26, 2015, when the Supreme Court held in [Obergefell v. Hodges](#) that the Fourteenth Amendment requires all states to grant same-sex marriages and recognize same-sex marriages granted in other states.



**Cody Charles Douell, Park Guide,
President William Jefferson Clinton
Birthplace Home National Historic Site,
Hope, AR**

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

I would say the greatest success I have had so far is by getting a permanent position with the NPS before I turned 26. In addition, I feel daily success in serving as a Ranger because I can help serve as an inspiration for others.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I felt pride in myself as part of the community as soon as gay marriage was legalized. It may sound like a normal thing, but my situation was incredibly abnormal for that. During the summer gay marriage became legal in all 50 states, I had an internship in Washington, D.C., with the Treasury Department. While there, the Treasury and the Supreme Court had an intern exchange, so I got to go the Supreme Court on the day it ruled on gay marriage, making me one of the first people in the world to discover it was legalized. I was there to see the "running of the interns," and I had NEVER seen so many happy people in my life and to see all the support, pomp, and circumstance made me happy to be bisexual for the first time in my life.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

One of my previous supervisors. He showed me it was okay to be gay while you worked; that there isn't a difference in "straight" and "gay" work I was led to believe growing up in rural Arkansas. I will forever respect him for that.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Don't be afraid to be yourself!



Mary Scales, Historic Structures Inventory Program Coordinator, NPS Santa Fe Regional Office, Santa Fe, NM

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

My greatest success is yet to come, as I have only just begun my career!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

Visibility is my greatest pride.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

There is no single person who inspired me, but I am grateful to and for those before me, and I stand on their shoulders.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Get involved, however that looks for you. Advocacy comes in many forms.



Justyn Foth, National Migratory Bird Joint Venture Coordinator, FWS, Washington, DC

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

When I discovered support from friends and colleagues in an otherwise conservative profession.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

Ken Kriese. He has been my mentor and assisted me in navigating this profession as a gay man.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Just be yourself and emphasize the strengths you bring to the team.



Melissa Axtman, Acting Management Analyst, Great American Outdoor Act, Project Management Office, NPS, Washington Support Office, Washington, DC

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

My greatest success has been creating a network of excellence over the last 35 years. I have worked with amazing staff throughout the Facility Management world. Being able to reach out for their help, guidance, expertise and friendship is truly the greatest reward.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My great friend Debra King. She was an amazing, powerful woman. She always faced adversity with pride in herself and her family. I was privileged to be included in that circle.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

In 1988 when I came out to my mom. The rest was easy.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Enjoy working for a great organization but understand that it's not all roses. Surround yourself with a caring team.

Michelle Rose Plampin, Research Hydrologist, USGS, Reston, VA

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

I have had a number of technical achievements including some publications and having organized some good scientific meetings. However, the thing I am most proud of is that I was able to find a way out of a bad working situation into a diverse, dynamic and supportive group of people who value my skills and accept my whole self.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

When I first owned up to my bisexual identity I was relieved, excited, and scared. Accepting my sexual orientation was only one step in my journey, though. When I then discovered my trans female gender identity, I was at first overtaken with dysphoria. As I've been taking steps toward becoming a truer version of myself, I have become happier, healthier and prouder than I ever imagined was possible!

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

I don't know her personally, but I would have to say Ellen DeGeneres. She has done so much to normalize the queer community just by unapologetically being her charismatic self.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

I highly recommend joining our LGBTQ+ Employee Resource Group. They have been so supportive to me. Also, if you find yourself in a toxic situation at first, find a way out! We are a broad agency and there are many opportunities to move around within it.





Keaton Jones, Visitor Use Assistant, NPS Grand Teton National Park, Moran Entrance, WY

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

My greatest success of my federal career thus far has definitely been my current job. I graduated with a degree in Park Management in 2020 and did a couple of seasonal internships. Landing an actual seasonal JOB and at a big park like Grand Teton has been amazing. Also my coworkers are so supportive!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

There are certain cities around the world that celebrate pride year round and very hard core. I visited Toronto, Canada in 2018. There were pride flags hung everywhere and stores would have small signs in their windows if they were a pride-supporting business. I really felt so loved!

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

There are so many people in the community that are so inspiring. There are so many people who are allies, who are so uplifting. Over the whole span of COVID-19, the app TikTok has become so popular. There, so many members of the community were able to gain popularity and use their platform for good. One of my favorites is [Sadie Framness](#). She is a young adult, around the same age as me. She has struggled with being accepted by her family for being anything

other than straight, so she uses her voice to support others that may be like herself. It is really incredible to see her videos every day. I really could name so many more, but if you want me to pick one person, there you go!

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

The National Park Service wears this intense uniform, but apart from that, I feel like I can really be my true self. Everyone I have met has been so encouraging. I have a tough time showing who I am, but I feel like everyone wants you to be super comfortable and to not hide who you really are. It is really hard to explain, you really just have to experience this yourself.





Meaghan Johnson, Chief of Resource Management and Science, NPS, National Parks of Eastern North Carolina, Manteo, NC

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

The greatest success of my federal career has been stepping into my current position here for the National Parks of Eastern North Carolina. Managing the resources and science for five park units is an incredible honor.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

I first felt prideful of my identity when I met my wife. Realizing who I was and who I wanted to be with was a very powerful moment for me. We now have a beautiful daughter and I am very proud of the family and life we have created.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

An inspiring member of the LGBTQIA+ community for me is Sally Ride, America's first female astronaut. Although many people did not know she was a lesbian while she was alive, she helped pave the way for women in science working alongside her partner for many years. Although she chose to come out after her death through her obituary, she still wanted the world to know who she was and who she loved.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Welcome! There are resources and staff here to support you and share your experiences with. I hope you feel a part of the larger community as much as I do.



Meaghan, right, with wife Shelli and daughter Emmy.



Ethan Daley, Assistant Crew Lead, NPS, Rocky Mountain Fire and Fuels Crew, CO

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

The greatest success of my federal career has been saving homes and protecting lives during wildfires last year in Utah. More than once last year, I fought fire in communities that were being evacuated and directly saved homes. Usually we don't interact with the public much during fire operations, and these instances made me proud of my work.

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

The moment I felt most prideful of my orientation was at a pride march in Baltimore I attended. It was my first time experiencing the support and community that comes with a large group of LGBTQIA+ individuals and I loved it.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

I don't remember their name, but I had an instructor at my engine academy who was openly gay. It takes a lot of courage to be open about your sexual orientation in the rural wildland firefighting community. They stand out in my mind in helping me to be more open about my bisexuality to my friends and coworkers and showing me that I was not the only LGBTQIA+ firefighter out there.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

Don't be afraid to be yourself. I've been pleasantly surprised how supportive and accepting the staff are in the DOI, even burly fire folks.



Pictured, above and left: Ethan fighting wildfires in Utah last summer.



James Blakely, Park Ranger, NPS, Grand Teton National Park, WY

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

One of my greatest successes thus far was attending the Park Ranger Law Enforcement Academy at Skagit Valley Community College. Even though, unfortunately, I failed the final bench press of the PEB exam and ultimately did not earn my commission, I was able to accomplish things I never thought I was capable of. Overall, I achieved high marks academically including the final test scenarios. Additionally, I moved the needle for myself physically and mentally in many ways and overcame several major hurdles. Sometimes our biggest accomplishments don't always hit our goals and dreams, but in the end, this gave me a level of confidence in myself that I hadn't had before. I may not know what road lies ahead in terms of a career in law enforcement with the National Park Service, but I hope to continue down that path with the agency.

What was the moment when you first felt proud of your LGBTQ+ identity?

It was maybe a little over a year after I came out. I had moved to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to work a seasonal position at a nearby state park and was renting a room from a friend and former colleague that I had known in college (way before I was out). As I settled into my new position and new town, pride month rapidly approached. I asked my friend Jim if I could hang a rainbow flag for pride next to our Idaho Vandals flag. Jim enthusiastically obliged! This was the first time I was able to hang the rainbow flag in such a public setting. Seeing the flag hang off our front porch everyday brought me great pride for finally being out - for living more open and authentically, especially in the very conservative state of Idaho, where at the time it was still

legal to fire someone for being gay. The rainbow flag stayed up well past June and I hope that it brought joy and pride to other passersby. I am super grateful to my friend Jim for opening his front porch and letting a little pride shine into his life.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

The most inspiring member of the LGBTQ community that I personally know is my best friend and boyfriend of 5 years. He has persevered through an abusive father and religion that kept him in the closet for many years and that almost cost him his life. Despite all his hardships in life, he found the courage to come out when everyone around told him he would "burn in Hell and die of AIDS." His strength, love and generous heart amazes me every day. He embodies the meaning of "It gets better."

Also, Pete Buttigieg. I may not know him personally, but it was truly inspiring watching him run for President of the United States.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

You are seen. You are loved. You are safe in our family. And, most importantly, you matter. And in the words of my favorite outdoorsy drag queen Pattie Gonia, "Live unapologetically. You have nothing to prove and everything to give."





**Owen Ellis, Visitor Use Assistant, NPS,
Montezuma Castle and Tuzigoot
National Monuments, AZ**

What would you say was the greatest success of your federal career?

Getting a permanent job after nearly ten years as a seasonal employee!

What was the moment when you first felt prideful of your LGBTQ+ identity?

The first summer after I began transition, I had a great interaction with a trans visitor at my visitor center in Yellowstone. It had been a rocky couple of months, and I think both that visitor and I felt a lot more normal after meeting each other in that space.

Who in the LGBTQ+ community inspires you?

My first ever supervisor in the NPS was a lesbian who had come up through the military long before the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” and she was an excellent mentor for me as a young queer working in government.

What insight would you share with LGBTQ+ individuals joining DOI?

“We’re here for the public, and the public is all of us!”





<https://fedsfeedfamilies.ocio.usda.gov/>

Feds Feed Families is a government-wide campaign which encourages federal employees to give to food banks and pantries. This year's campaign ends August 31. Get involved today!



Stock photo



Each month, the **Connections** Team conducts a roundtable discussion as a follow-up to that month’s issue. Although speakers and panelists will vary, the roundtable discussions will be a safe and respectful place to discuss the content, ask questions of the team and share ideas, insights and stories to keep the conversation going.

Please join us! Just click on the date/time to register. Thank you!

July	Caribbean American Heritage Month	<u>Thursday, July 15, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>
August	European American Heritage Month	<u>Thursday, August 19, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>
September	Hispanic American Heritage Month	<u>Thursday, September 16, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>
October	Disability Employment Awareness Month	<u>Thursday, October 21, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>
November	Native American Heritage Month	<u>Thursday, November 18, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>
December	Holiday Traditions from Around the World	<u>Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 3:00 PM Eastern</u>

Connections Magazine for July:

*Connections Magazine is a monthly publication produced under the co-executive sponsorship of **Jacqueline M. Jones**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administrative Services, and **Erica White-Dunston**, Director of the Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights. Your input is essential to making this a valuable resource for all employees.*

Please feel free to share your ideas, suggestions and articles/pictures with editor Stephen Carlisle at Stephen_Carlisle@ibc.doi.gov. Thanks!

The views and conclusions contained in this work are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the U.S. Government.



Interior’s Employee Assistance Program provider, **Espyrr**, is here for employees and their dependents. **Espyrr** provides confidential counseling and consultation at no cost via telephone or other

virtual means. A live counselor is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 800-869-0276 or visit espyr.com (Password: InteriorEAP).

JUNE TEENTH

DREAM LIKE MARTIN

LEAD LIKE HARRIET

FIGHT LIKE MALCOLM

WRITE LIKE MAYA

SPEAK LIKE FREDERICK

DARE LIKE SHIRLEY

THINK LIKE GARVEY

RECLAIM LIKE MAXINE

EDUCATE LIKE W.E.B.

CHALLENGE LIKE ROSA

INSPIRE LIKE OBAMA

WIN LIKE KAMALA

Juneteenth Day

An Invitation to Celebrate

Dear Colleagues,

In her recent all-employee message, Secretary Haaland invited DOI employees to make Juneteenth “a day for us to commit together to eradicate the enduring system of racism and address slavery’s intergenerational impacts.” Although the day itself has passed, we invite you to celebrate the spirit of Juneteenth by embracing the Secretary’s call for collective commitment.

Commemorating Juneteenth is an opportunity to celebrate freedom, education and achievement and acknowledge the ongoing struggles faced by the African American community. The disproportionate impact of mass incarceration, discriminatory housing policies, and a lack of educational and economic investment in communities, along with the acts of violence and racial profiling incidents that continue to capture national attention, shows that while the African American community has made progress over the past 150 years, considerable barriers continue to impede that progress.

In cities across the United States, people of all races and ethnicities continue to commemorate Juneteenth with celebrations and conversations to learn about the African American experience. Juneteenth is a time for families and friends to come together, break bread, and honor ancestors. As advocates for diversity, you can be leaders within DOI in sharing facts about Black history, discussing historical events



and acknowledging the ongoing fight for civil rights and equity. Celebrating the end of slavery in 1865 need not just occur on one day. I encourage you to continue to educate yourself and others around you about ways to achieve the broader vision of freedom. You can start by visiting [DOI’s historical sites dedicated to remembering the fight against slavery in the United States](#).

Erica White-Dunston, Esq.
Director, Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights | Principal Diversity Officer



Performers in the Buffalo, NY Juneteenth parade in 2018. Photo by James P. McCoy

Juneteenth Day

A Proclamation on Juneteenth Day of Observance, 2021

On June 19, 1865 — nearly nine decades after our Nation’s founding, and more than 2 years after President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation — enslaved Americans in Galveston, Texas, finally received word that they were free from bondage. As those who were formerly enslaved were recognized for the first time as citizens, Black Americans came to commemorate Juneteenth with celebrations across the country, building new lives and a new tradition that we honor today. In its celebration of freedom, Juneteenth is a day that should be recognized by all Americans. And that is why I am proud to have consecrated Juneteenth as our newest national holiday.

Juneteenth is a day of profound weight and power.

A day in which we remember the moral stain and terrible toll of slavery on our country — what I’ve long called America’s original sin. A long legacy of systemic racism, inequality, and inhumanity.

But it is a day that also reminds us of our incredible capacity to heal, hope, and emerge from our darkest moments with purpose and resolve.

As I said on the 100th Anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre, great nations don’t ignore the most painful chapters of their past. Great nations confront them. We come to terms with them.

On Juneteenth, we recommit ourselves to the work of equity, equality, and justice. And, we celebrate the centuries of struggle, courage, and hope that have brought us to this time of progress and possibility. That work has been led throughout our history by abolitionists and educators, civil rights advocates and lawyers, courageous activists and trade unionists, public officials, and everyday Americans who have helped make real the ideals of our founding documents for all.

There is still more work to do. As we emerge from the long, dark winter of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, racial equity remains at the heart of our efforts to vaccinate the Nation and beat the virus. We must recognize that Black Americans, among other people of color, have

shouldered a disproportionate burden of loss — while also carrying us through disproportionately as essential workers and health care providers on the front lines of the crisis.

Psalm 30 proclaims that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Juneteenth marks both the long, hard night of slavery and discrimination, and the promise of a brighter morning to come. My Administration is committed to building an economy — and a Nation — that brings everyone along, and finally delivers our Nation’s founding promise to Black Americans. Together, we will lay the roots of real and lasting justice, so that we can become the extraordinary country that was promised to all Americans.

Juneteenth not only commemorates the past. It calls us to action today.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR., President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim June 19, 2021, as Juneteenth Day of Observance. I call upon the people of the United States to acknowledge and celebrate the end of the Civil War and the emancipation of Black Americans, and commit together to eradicate systemic racism that still undermines our founding ideals and collective prosperity.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of June, in the year of our Lord two thousand twenty-one, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-fifth.

JOSEPH R. BIDEN JR.



Juneteenth Day

A New National Holiday

From NPS/DOI

On June 17, 2021, Juneteenth National Independence Day was signed into law as a new national holiday.

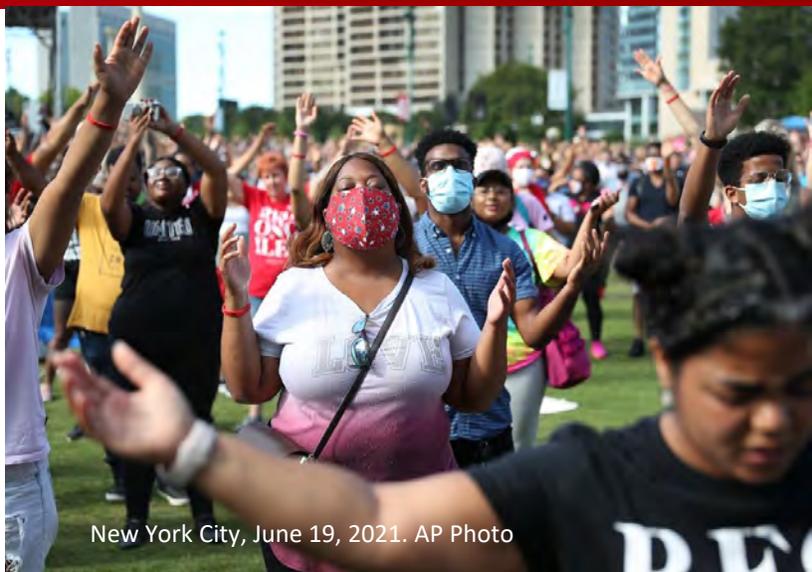
Juneteenth (June 19) is one of the oldest known commemorations related to the abolition of slavery in the United States. The word “Juneteenth” is a Black English contraction, or portmanteau, of the month “June” and the date “Nineteenth.” Juneteenth celebrates the date of June 19, 1865, when enslaved people of African descent located in Galveston, Texas, finally learned of their freedom from the slavery system in the United States.

Freedom was granted through the Emancipation Proclamation signed on January 1, 1863, by President Abraham Lincoln. Texas was the farthest away of the Confederate states, and slaveholders there made no attempt to free the enslaved African Americans they held in bondage. This meant that President Lincoln’s proclamation was unenforceable without military intervention, which eventually came nearly two and a half years later.

The question of slavery divided the nation during the decades leading up to the Civil War. But by September of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln made abolition a formal position of the U.S. government when he announced the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that enslaved people in states or areas of “rebellion against the United States” would be free effective on January 1, 1863. However, the proclamation was not enforceable in those slaveholding areas for which it applied.

Nevertheless, as Union troops moved through the South, they brought the news of emancipation with them and the ability to enforce the order through military might. Further encouraged by the proclamation, large numbers of enslaved African Americans self-liberated, escaping chattel slavery to seek refuge behind Union lines when geographically feasible. Many of these freedom seekers joined the U.S. Army and Navy to fight as United States Colored Troops throughout the remainder of the Civil War.

Two years later in April 1865, Confederate General in Chief Robert E. Lee surrendered to Commanding General Ulysses S. Grant of the US Army after the Battle of Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia. While this is often viewed as the



effective end of the U.S. Civil War, in parts of the Trans-Mississippi West the war had yet to conclude. Well into May 1865, battles between federal troops and Confederate forces continued in Texas. It was not until June 2, 1865, that Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith finally surrendered the Trans-Mississippi West to US forces.

On June 19, 1865, US Brigadier General Gordon Granger and his troops landed at Galveston, Texas confirming the news that the Civil War had ended and that enslaved African Americans were now free. Prior to Granger’s arrival, the US military presence in Texas was too weak to enforce President Lincoln’s 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Two months after General Lee’s surrender in Virginia, Union forces were strong enough to act as a liberating force for enslaved African Americans throughout the state.

In the years before Granger’s landing, news of the proclamation was slow to reach Texas, and did not reach some quarters at all. In other places, the news was hidden by slaveholders to preserve slavery. One of Granger’s first acts was to announce freedom for African Americans; many left Texas immediately for the North or to search for family in other slaveholding states. Even freedom seekers with no fixed destination left their place of bondage, if for no other reason than to grasp freedom for the first time.

The Juneteenth celebration grew during the years following the Civil War, with many formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendants making annual anniversary pilgrimages to Galveston. Although the ratification of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in December 1865 ultimately abolished slavery in all areas of the nation, Juneteenth captured the jubilation of the end of slavery in the Confederacy.

Juneteenth Day



Group of elders on Juneteenth. Photograph by Grace Murray Stephenson of celebrations in Eastwoods Park, Austin, TX in 1900.

Mrs. Stephenson kept a diary of the day's events, which she later sold to the San Francisco Chronicle for a full-page feature.



Juneteenth band. Photograph by Grace Murray Stephenson of celebrations in Eastwoods Park, Austin, TX in 1900.

All images in the public domain.

Juneteenth Day

Martha Yates Jones (left) and Pinkie Yates (right), daughters of [Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates](#) (below), in a decorated carriage parked in front of the Antioch Baptist Church located in Houston's Fourth Ward, Juneteenth 1908.



Group on Emancipation Day, circa 1880s, in Houston's Emancipation Park. Reverend Yates, who led the effort for the community to purchase the Park in 1872, is pictured on the far left, and his daughter Sallie Yates is seen dressed in black in the center.



Detail from a photograph of celebrations in Richmond, Virginia, ca. 1905.



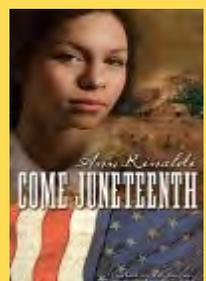
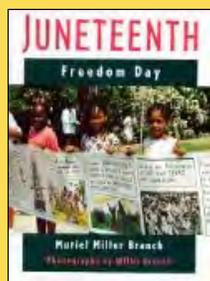
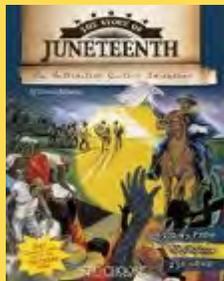
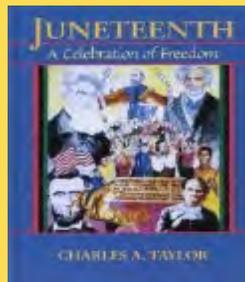
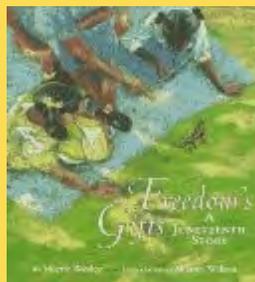
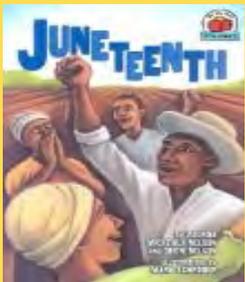
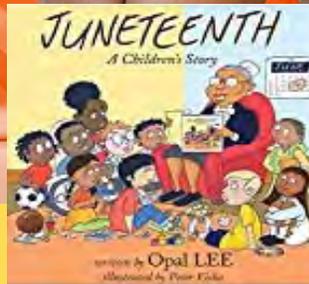
All images in the public domain.

Juneteenth Day

Recommended Children's Books



Stock photo



[Juneteenth for Mazie by Floyd Cooper](#)

[Juneteenth Jamboree by Carol Boston Weatherford](#)

[Juneteenth: A Children's Story by Opal Lee](#)

[Juneteenth by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson](#)

[Raven The Great: What is Juneteenth? By Dr. Paulette McClain](#)

[Freedom's Gifts: A Juneteenth Story by Valerie Wesley](#)

[All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom by Angela Johnson](#)

[Juneteenth \(Celebrating Holidays\) by Rachel Grack](#)

[Juneteenth: A Celebration of Freedom by Charles Taylor](#)

[The Story of Juneteenth: An Interactive History Adventure by Steven Otfinoski](#)

[Juneteenth: Freedom Day by Muriel Miller Branch](#)

[Come Juneteenth by Ann Rinaldi](#)

[Tiny's Emancipation by Linda Baten Johnson](#)

Juneteenth Day

What does it mean for you now that Juneteenth is a national holiday?

As I contemplated what recognizing Juneteenth as a federal holiday means to me, the words of Sen. Edward Markey resonated with me; he eloquently tweeted, “We have a long road towards racial justice in the United States and we cannot get there without acknowledging our nation’s original sin of slavery.” I wholeheartedly agree that Juneteenth should be a federal holiday. It is a remarkable step toward healing the wounds of our past as we strive for the greater goal of racial justice and equality for all.

Shelita Saint-Louis, Chief, Acquisition Management Division, IBC

Juneteenth to me is bittersweet. While I am glad that the reason for Juneteenth has been highlighted nationally, it saddens me that there are still so many other battles for equality yet to be fought. Hopefully it will help all of us to recognize the struggles and the sacrifices of African Americans all over the country. Perhaps this will be one small step towards more concrete action for civil rights.

Nichole King-Campbell, Emergency Continuity Coordinator, IBC

I grew up in Dayton, Ohio, and remember visiting historical landmarks on the Underground Railroad, the Harriet Beecher Stowe house, and the Rankin house, among others. Although I was not familiar with Juneteenth and why it existed, visiting these historical sites created special resonance for this particular holiday with me, having been very familiar with the crucial civil rights milestone and the brave abolitionists in Ohio who helped contribute to the freedom of Americans who were the victims of horrible injustice and degradation.

Joe Edmonds, Planning and Environmental Specialist, BLM

Hearing the news today that Congress passed the Bill to make Juneteenth a federal holiday, the words that immediately came to my mind were: the value and strength of long-suffering, perseverance, endurance, and most of all “Freedom” with the hope to never allow history to repeat the atrocities of our past. Celebrate is another word that comes to mind right now as we remember the past and understand the sacrifices of our ancestors. Happy Juneteenth!!!

**Acquanetta Newson, Lead Special Emphasis Program Manager,
Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights**



Juneteenth Day

Message from the Secretary

I have been proud to join the Black community for their Juneteenth celebrations -- the food, music, dancing, and somber recognition that Juneteenth was the first step toward freedom for their ancestors. We are still working for equity and inclusion for our Black communities, and the first step is acknowledging our country's full history.

I'm proud to be part of an Administration that recognizes this significant day as a federal holiday, so that our whole country can understand how meaningful this day is for our Black friends and family members.

— 



Booker T. Washington remembered his mother “was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying but fearing that she would never live to see.”

Pictured, left: a reenactment of “the moment of freedom” for the Washington family at [Booker T. Washington National Monument](#) in Virginia. Photo NPS

Juneteenth Day

“Juneteenth may mark just one moment in the struggle for emancipation, but the holiday gives us an occasion to reflect on the profound contributions of enslaved Black Americans to the cause of human freedom. It gives us another way to recognize the central place of slavery and its demise in our national story. And it gives us an opportunity to remember that American democracy has more authors than the shrewd lawyers and erudite farmer-philosophers of the Revolution, that our experiment in liberty owes as much to the men and women who toiled in bondage as it does to anyone else in this nation’s history.” — Jamelle Bouie



Connections

Inclusion, Equity and Respect

The Connections Team is an engaged group of talented volunteers from across Interior who produce Connections Magazine, sponsor roundtable discussions and foster greater understanding around inclusion, equity and respect. [We would love to hear from you!](#)

